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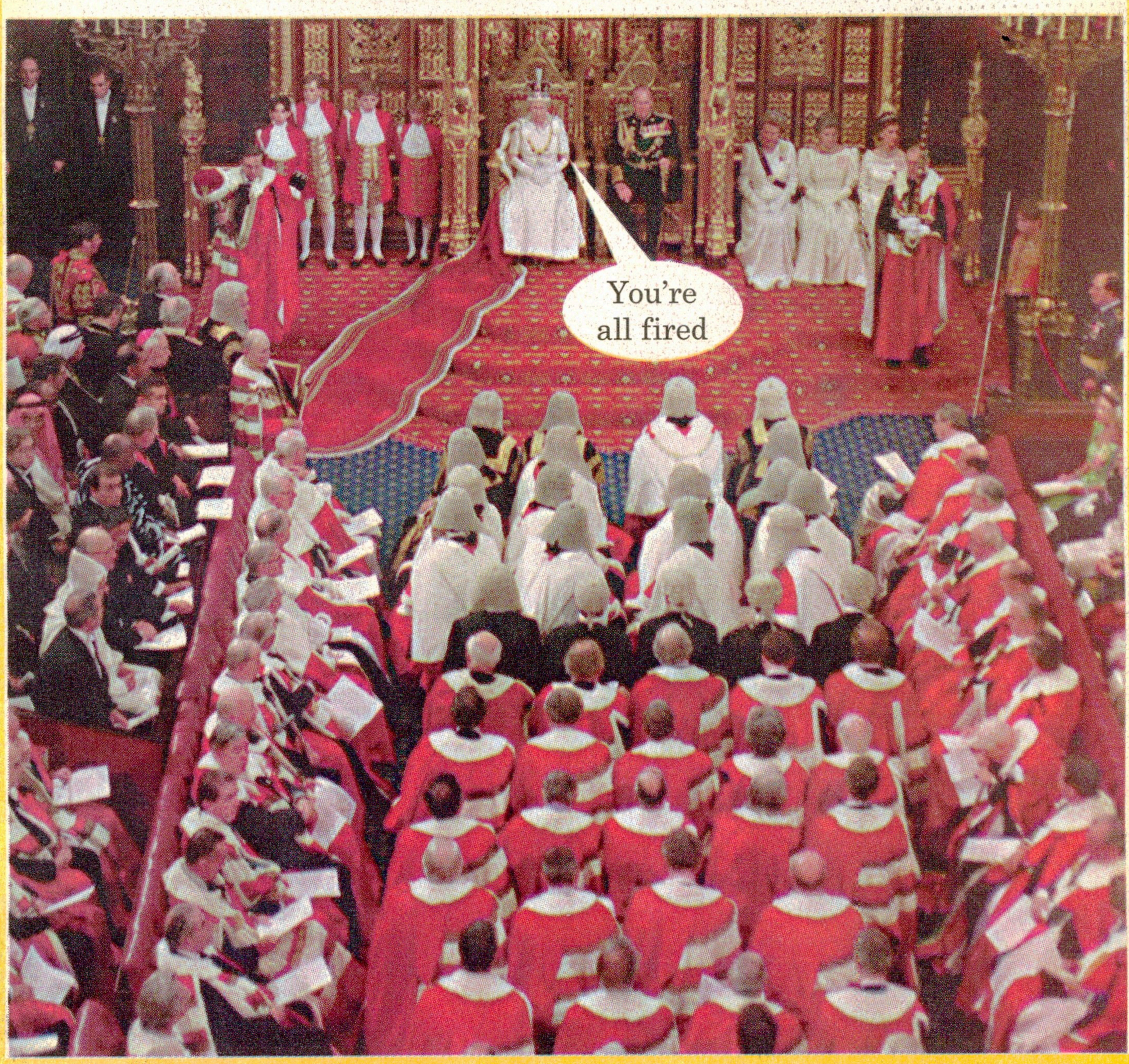

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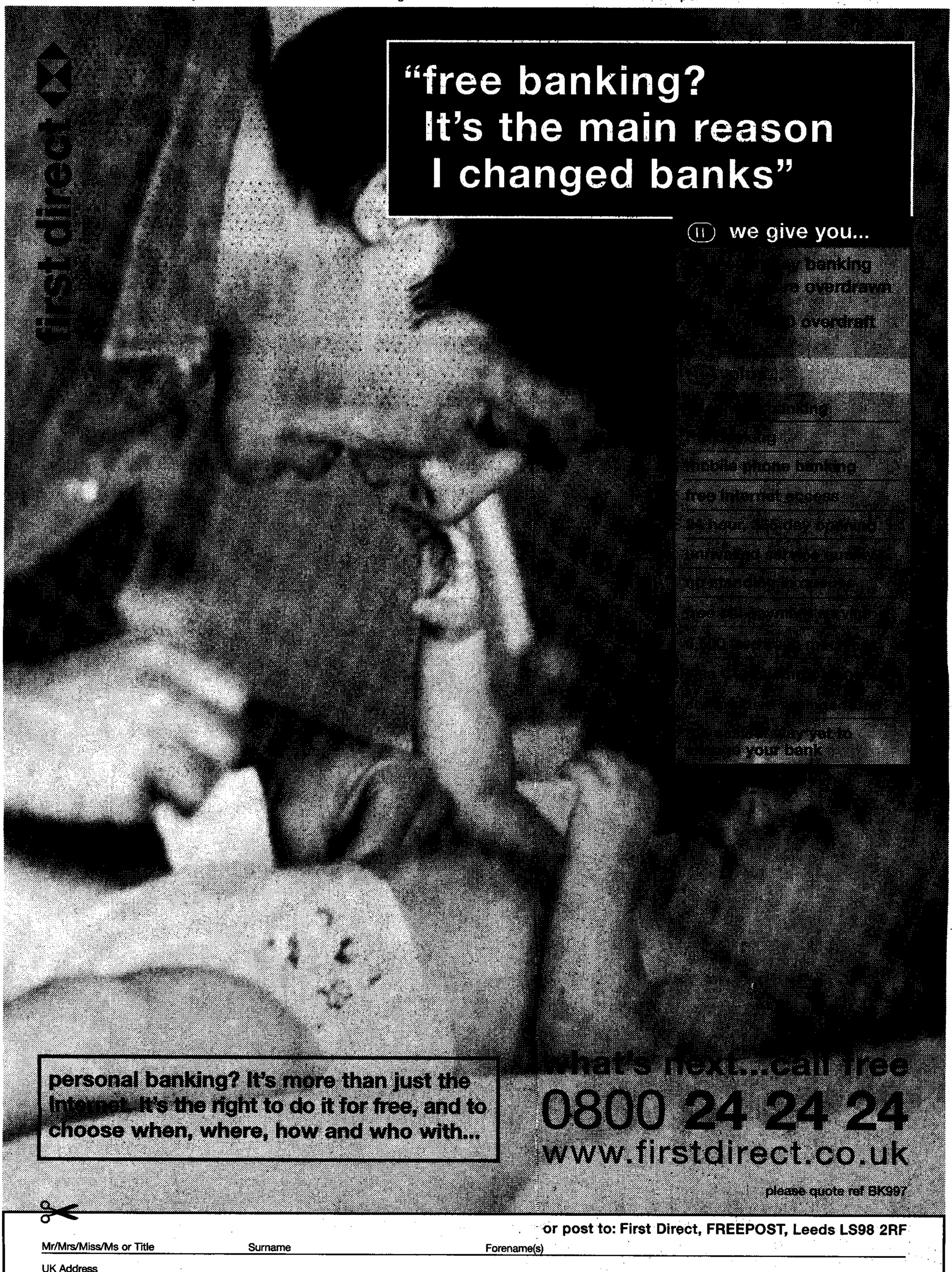
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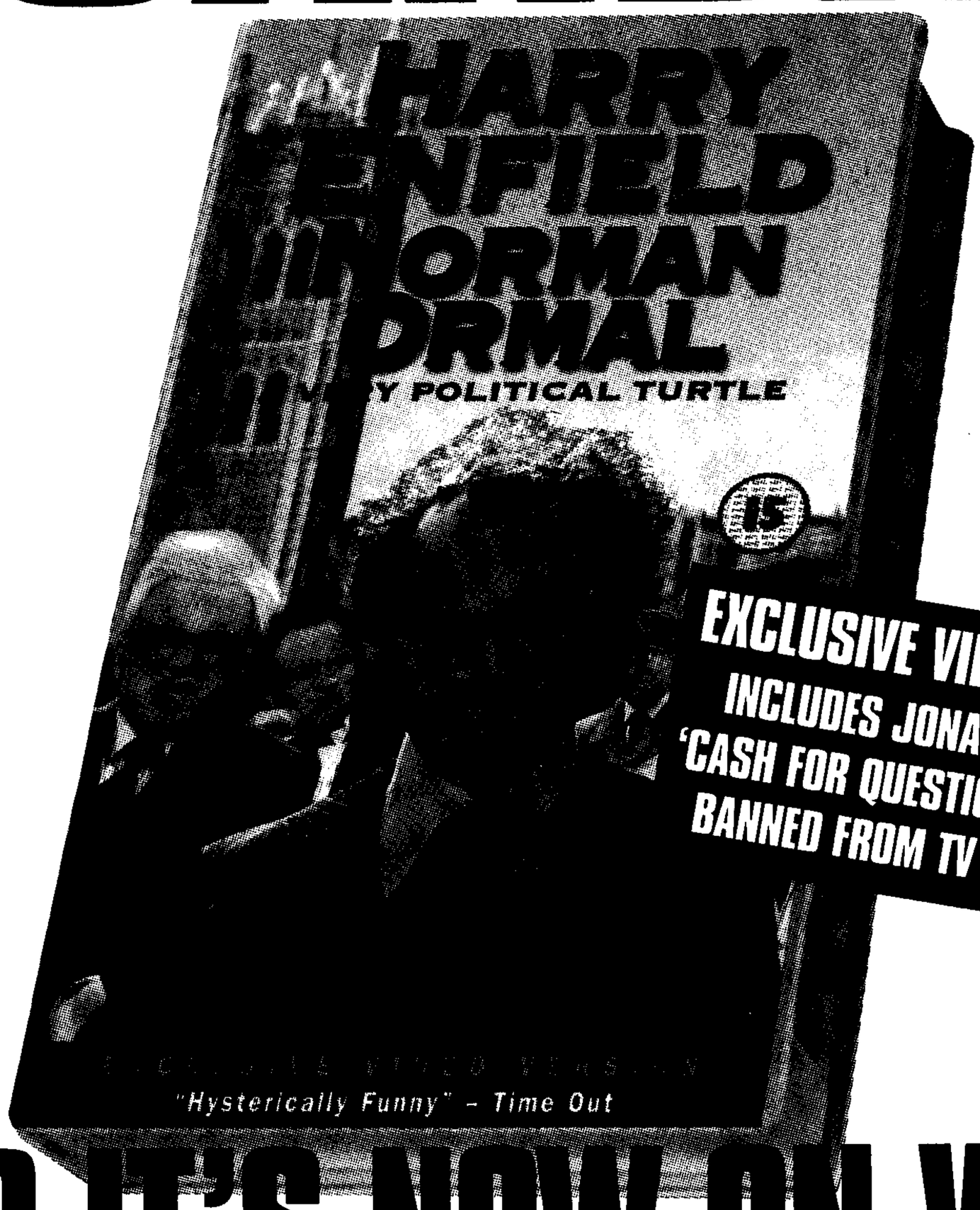

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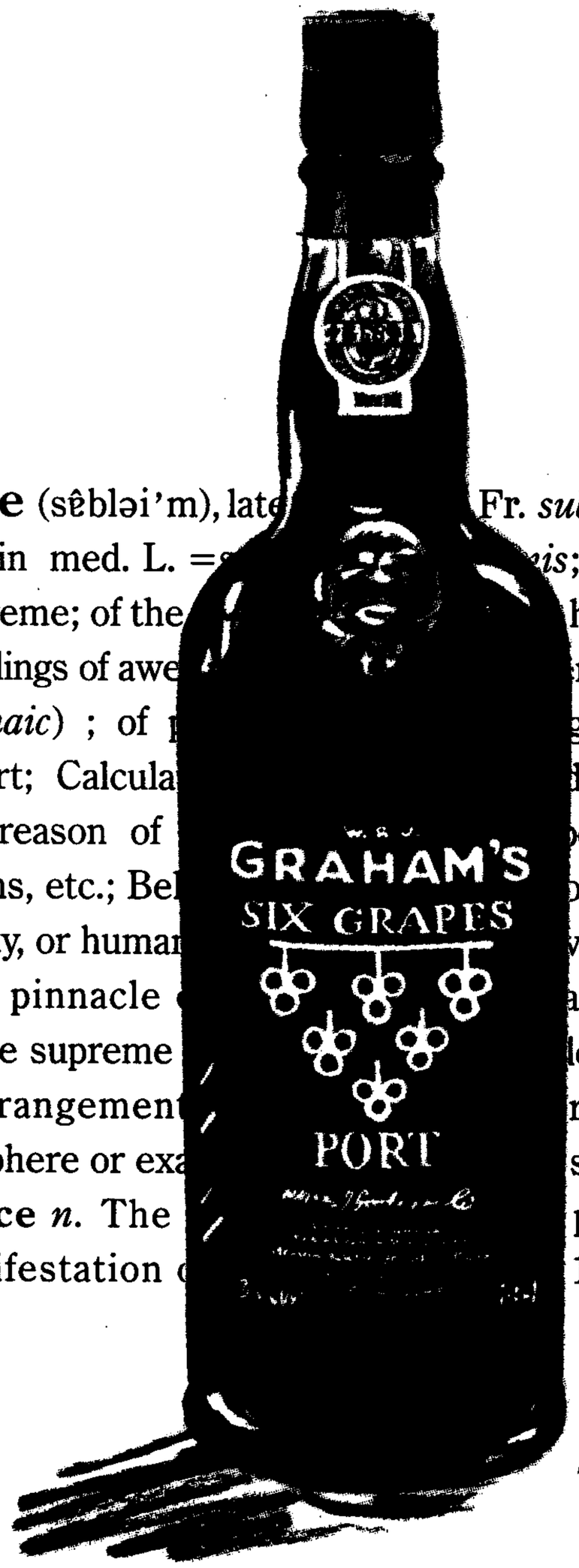

Sublime (sẽbləi'm), late… Fr. *sublimer* or L. *sublimare* lift up, elevate (in med. L. =s… *is*;] **1.** *adj.* exalted, lofty; majestic; supreme; of the … highest or noblest nature; awakening feelings of awe … neration; raised up, lifted on high (*archaic*) ; of … g (*literary*); Of things in nature and art; Calcula… deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of … eauty, or grandeur 1700; Of ideas, truths, etc.; Be… o the highest regions of thought, reality, or human… vity 1634. **2.** *n.* that which is sublime; a pinnacle … achievement, surpassing excellence, the supreme … legree, the lofty or grand, in thought, arrangement… r style; **3.** *v.* To raise to an elevated sphere or exa… spiritually) sublime 1609. **Quintessence** *n.* The … purest or most perfect form or manifestation … 1570. **Quintesse-ntial** *a.*

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Gnome

I was deeply saddened to see so many people prepared to support the Queen in the recent Australian referendum.

I am a lifelong opponent of the hereditary principle which allows power and wealth to be handed down from one generation to the next, enabling those who have done nothing whatsoever to enjoy huge prestige and influence.

Here in the Gnome organisation we all share this hatred of non-*meritocratic* privilege. I, Lord Gnome, my son Lachlustre Gnome, head of Gnome News International, my other son James Gnome, head of GnomeNet.uk, my son-in-law, whose name I can't remember but whom I gave some job or other to, my daugher Elizabeth II Gnome, head of Gnome Satellite Enterprises, my ex-wives, who all sit on the board of Gnome Global Holdings plc, and my current wife Wendy Gnome who is head of Gnome Pacific Rim Developments (Neasden-to-Beijing)...

Need I say more?

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COLOUR SECTION

WITH "new" Labour's London selection panel finally due to meet on 16 November after a number of false starts, the question remains: will Ken Livingstone be allowed to stand against Frank Dobson or will his serial disloyalty to the Rev Blair be used to block him?

As the arguments flow back and forth, a ferocious row has broken out between party general-secretary Margaret McDonagh, who fears that the London Labour party would implode should Livingstone be blocked, and the PM's prim political aide Sally Morgan.

Morgan, along with Tony Blair and, somewhat surprisingly, Gordon Brown, wants to prevent Leninspart's name appearing on the ballot paper altogether. So deep is Number 10's hatred of Leninspart they would rather he stood as an independent candidate.

Should the people's Ken be barred from standing, however, he is unlikely to retire gracefully to the Commons backbenches to eke out his days as a sad and forgotten newt lover. Having already worked out that his chances of becoming mayor would be substantially improved by standing as an independent – he should be able to rely on many second preference votes from Tories and Liberal Democrats – the crafty Ken will be sorely tempted to go it alone.

The prospect of immediate expulsion from the Labour party would follow. But Livingstone would unlikely to be the only one, with hundreds of Labour party members risking expulsion by supporting and campaigning for him, while other Labour left-wingers such as MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott would also have to be thrown out on their ear.

The 80s expulsions of Derek "Degsy" Hatton and his Spartite Militant chums would seem like a tea party in comparison with any London wide purge, which is why the stakes have become so high. As the realisation dawns in Downing Street that Leninspart could even win the rigged electoral college contest, the odds increase of a London Labour party bust-up of gargantuan proportions.

LABOUR party members who have received a personal letter from Frank Dobson asking for their support, followed by duplicated letters from Blairite MPs requesting the same, have been informed by both Dobbo and London minister Nick Raynsford that their addresses had been handed over by sympathetic MEPs and MPs.

This could be because in the hugely unlikely event of the full list of Labour's 75,000 members being handed over by the party's central office, without their permission, a host of London Labour MPs could find themselves in hot water with officers from the Data Protection Agency.

Dobbo's protestations of innocence would carry more weight had not Labour party members recently been in receipt of the party's dire in-house mag, *Inside Labour*, and discovered that the numbers gracing the mag's packaging mysteriously corresponded with the numbers on Frank's begging letters.

So how could Frank's little helpers have illegally obtained Labour's membership lists? Unkind voices are drawing attention to Frank's daughter, Sally Dobson, now working on her father's campaign. By remarkable coincidence she had previously been at Labour's Millbank HQ where she worked in general-secretary Margaret McDonagh's office.

LONDON's posties have been weighed down with sacks of extra mail in recent days, courtesy of Father Christmas-lookalike Frank Dobson and his seasonal team of little helpers.

The coordinator of Dobbo's campaign is Labour MP Ann Keen, and her little helper is parliamentary colleague Siobhain McDonagh (sister of Margaret – see above). But even they may have surpassed themselves by helping to organise a mass mailing of London Labour Party members by other Dobbo supporting MPs.

Each letter was stamped "Member of the Parliamentary Labour Party", and followed by a House of Commons address on the reverse. Within days, hundreds of redirected Dobbo letters had been returned "addressee unknown" to the PLP office in the Commons, which had had no warning of the shabby little exercise in progress.

All envelopes had been through a franking machine and been sent out second class, costing the Dobbo camp in excess of £12,000.

FARMERS must be protected because the future of the countryside rests in their hands. So said Henry Aubrey-Fletcher, chairman of the Country Landowners Association's environment and water committee, addressing a fringe meeting of the Tory party conference on 6 October.

Exactly a month earlier, on 6 September, Mr Aubrey-Fletcher had spoken at another meeting – this time in the village of Southwater in West Sussex. Before an assembled public he put forward a proposal to build 2,000 houses on 300 acres of greenfield site at Great House Farm owned by the Aubrey-Fletcher Trust.

The countryside cause will surely be much advanced by this development plan which would turn a large village into a medium-sized town and render Great House Farm farm-less.

A CHAMPAGNE reception at the Commons last week hosted by MPs Helen Brinton and Tim Loughton promised a forum to debate the forthcoming climate change levy.

This tax on fossil fuels will help Britain reduce emissions by 20 percent by 2010, as agreed at the Kyoto summit; but industry staunchly opposes the levy, saying it will cost £1.2bn and undermine competitiveness.

Who was the kindly benefactor who made the evening of disinterested discussion possible? Step forward Calor Gas, maker of liquefied petroleum gas, one of the fuels subject to the levy.

- *Dobson, Portillo et al: HP Sauce . . . 8-9*
- *Petsy Wyatt's Diary 24*
- *The Galway of the man: John Walsh in books 25*
- *Slicker on Archer: the full story . . . 28*

"It's our new failsafe system for stopping trains"

Street Of Shame

THE strain of editing the *Observer* seems to be too much for poor Roger Alton.

When his hacks threatened industrial action last week over a pay claim, Alton told management that he would head off the strike by making a "conciliatory and emollient" speech.

When the hacks duly assembled for his friendly pep talk, Alton was tact incarnate. "Fuck you!" he yelled. "If you want to strike, go ahead!"

WHEN Geoffrey Robinson next takes a break from writing his memoirs, he might care to ponder the following question: why is a hack on Robinson's *New Statesman*, an allegedly socialist magazine, attempting to close down the *West Highland Free Press*, Scotland's only socialist newspaper?

Alistair Moffat is a former boss of the Scottish Media Group, which owns the *Glasgow Herald* and STV, who is now reduced to editing the *NS*'s unreadable weekly "Scottish supplement". In his spare time, however, he is becoming a litigant of Goldsmithian proportions.

His libel suit against the *Free Press* was provoked by a jocular item in the paper's diary column, the delightfully named "Clippings from the phrase shed", which described Moffat as a "bully". As his QC told the court of session last month, this dread word "attributed to him a private character flaw or vice or behaviour which no right-minded person would wish to have attributed to them".

The judge, Lord Cameron, thought otherwise. The article was clearly a lampoon, he pointed out, and since Moffat was a man in the public eye "he may require to suffer what might be described as rough language or unmannerly jests". The case was dismissed – whereupon Moffat lodged an immediate appeal. If he wins that, he intends to start the whole libel suit all over again. The costs of this unmannerly jest could well bankrupt the newspaper.

The only consolation is that it could also scupper Moffat's political ambitions. His former colleague from the Scottish Media Group, Gus MacDonald, was recently given a peerage and a ministerial job, and Moffat might expect some sort of "new" Labour patronage for himself. However, the founder of the *West Highland Free Press*, who still takes a fond proprietorial interest in the paper, happens to be the deputy Scottish secretary, Brian Wilson MP. Any suggestion of honours or quango appointments for Moffat is now likely to be firmly vetoed.

THE *Sun* was not impressed by news that scientists may have found the cure to baldness after a Durham scientist transplanted a hair on to his wife's arm.

"Big deal!" screamed the editorial. "Only a few weeks ago another 'cure' for baldness was announced.

"The hard fact is that none of these things work for most people. Too many pharmaceutical giants have made too much money exploiting the vain hopes of bald men...

"The *Sun* says there is nothing WRONG with being bald."

The tone was surprisingly strong and, well, *personal*. Could it have anything to do with the fact that editor David Yelland is, er, follicly challenged?

JUST FANCY THAT!
(or where the Sun finds its stories)

"Sir, I find it amusing to see that w/e 16 October 1999, the autobiography of the great Noddy Holder sold 40 more copies than the memoirs of the not-so-great Norman Lamont."

— *Eye* 988 letters page, 29 October 1999

"Why we'll always prefer reading Noddy to Norman... Slade star's book outsells political memoirs."

— *Sun*, 4 November 1999

WAPPING hacks were vastly amused to read *Sun* TV editor Christine Smith's analysis of What's Wrong With the Beeb...

Staff morale at an all-time low, key contributors defecting because they feel unloved, reporting on serious topics ditched to make way for "consumer issues", unhealthy obsession with soap operas and second-rate pop stars, lack of imagination and risk-taking... It all sounded eerily like What's Wrong With the *Sun*.

The only difference is that the BBC has a new man in charge who may stop the rot. Greg Dyke, as Smith pointed out, is "renowned for his networking skills" – whereas David Yelland has none whatever. In a desperate attempt to raise morale, Yelland announced last year that every two months he would take his star columnists out for a meal/group-hug. It happened just once, before the experiment was wisely abandoned.

THE naïve Bruce Anderson nearly scuppered his chum Jonathan Aitken's chances of enjoying any more days out from Standford Hill Prison.

The Brute's tearful piece in the *Daily Mail* describing Aitken's first lunch outside prison gates waxed lyrical about his fitness, fortitude, holiness and stoicism, and revealed that he devoured news of the outside world eagerly. Readers could have been forgiven for thinking Aitken was doing 30 years in a Siberian labour camp rather than a few months in an open nick in Kent.

Anderson prattled on about Aitken enjoying a lunch of spicy chicken, chocolate mousse – and Australian chardonnay. Unfortunately, inmates let out for the day aren't allowed to drink alcohol and spoilsport prison officers have brought Anderson's *Mail* piece to the governor's attention. It appears Aitken may be spared punishment because he walked back inside soberly (unlike some inmates, who have to be helped from the car) and action cannot be taken retrospectively. Standford Hill screws are now pressing for the introduction of a breathalyser machine, already in use in some prisons.

After his next day out Aitken's breath will be keenly smelt on his return and any trace of alcohol will put him on a charge – threatening future days out, Christmas home leave and early release with a tag. Perhaps Brute should send him a packet of extra-strong mints.

MENSA's feted poet David Griffiths (see *Eye* 986), who penned a Nazi rant in *London Mensa News*, believed when he was at school that he was the reincarnation of Hitler.

For good measure, Griffiths also told school friends he was... the Antichrist. His reasoning was that he had never been christened and that the Bible predicts that a man will come from the east and rule with a rod of iron. Griffiths came from Openshaw in east Manchester.

His racism did not abate when he left school. Griffiths ended up at the Twickenham Conservative party to try to kick-start his political career. But he was too much even for home counties Tories and was expelled in 1986. That didn't stop the Mensa member trying to stand in the general election as the Antichrist. Not surprisingly, locals barred him from booking halls to hold his racist meetings.

Other unpleasant episodes include receiving a suspended sentence for assault. He also generously offered to father babies by artificial insemination, at £1,000 a time, in an effort to "help both this country and humanity in general by injecting more people of high intelligence into the population".

NEWS UNLIMITED, the *Guardian* website, led its lunchtime news update on 1 November with a piece on the crashed EgyptAir jet.

Under the headline "Fatal fatigue?", it began: "It's too early, and too distasteful, to come to any conclusions about the cause of the disaster which overtook EgyptAir flight 990" – before launching into a full-blown theory about the, er, causes of the crash.

Faulty workmanship was highlighted as the EgyptAir jet was built just before assembly workers went on strike due to overwork. Another 767, built two weeks before the EgyptAir plane, crashed with the loss of all aboard in 1991.

"It will be monstrously difficult to establish any direct link between these events," the writer humbly conceded – before maintaining that "at the very minimum, all Boeing aircraft assembled at that troubled time will have to be taken out of service and thoroughly inspected. Anything less would be playing with life itself."

DURING Jiang Zemin's state visit last month the pisspoor *Times* diary came up with a half-baked tale of "modernising royal courtiers" who wanted the Butcher of Tibet to give the Queen dinner at a restaurant in London's Chinatown instead of the usual formal banquet.

Jiang supposedly refused to play ball and insisted on giving Her Maj the full works at the Chinese embassy. The story, like so much of the *Times* diary these days, was what seasoned press commentators call "complete bollocks".

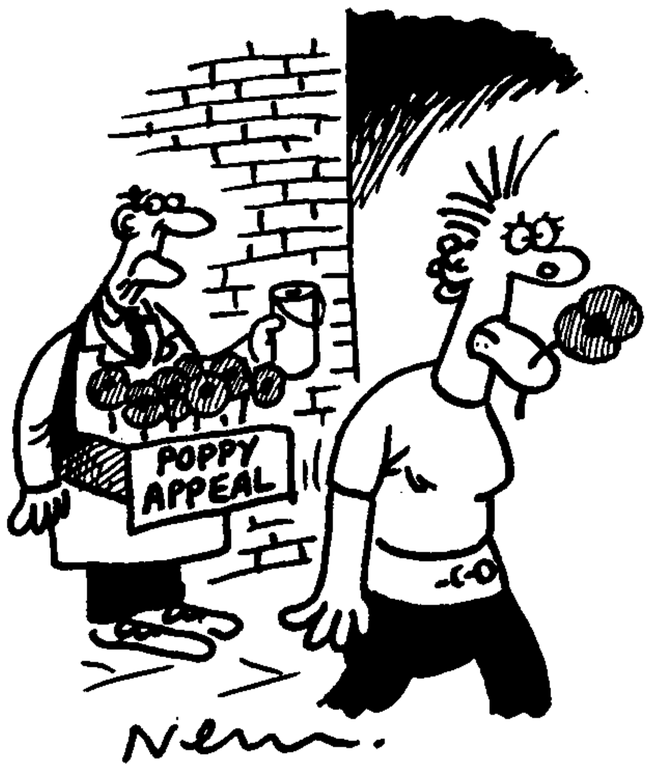
For "modernising royal courtiers" read our old friend Simon Lewis, Blairy spinner to the Queen, whose attempts to jollify the royal image haven't always gone down well with Her Indoors – under sufferance she took tea in a Glasgow council flat and visited McDonald's, but put her foot down when Lewis suggested shopping in Tesco (*Eye* 980). Even Lewis wasn't daft enough to interfere with the Chinese banquet: it was up to the honoured guests to call the tune and Chinatown was never considered as the venue.

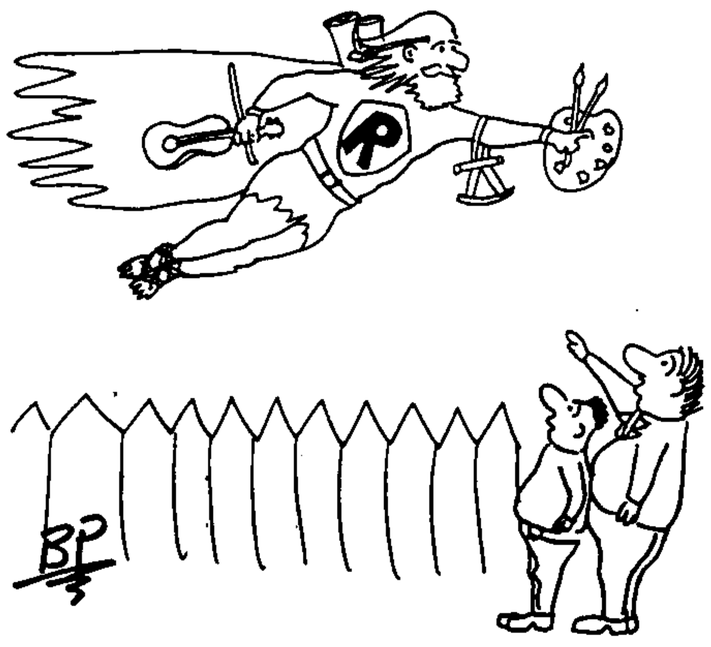
It did, however, feature in early proposals as a place for Jiang to visit for a walkabout, accompanied by the Queen. Lewis foresaw plenty of colourful photo-ops of the Queen meeting the ethnic minorities and thought Jiang might like to meet a few bods from the old country. The plan was, of course, knocked on the head by the Chinese, who know that the last people Jiang wants to meet are emigrant Chinese, who might be tempted, at the least, to give him a free character reading. So Jiang opted to visit the capitalist dome in Greenwich and the bourgeois Cambridge University instead. At least these were Chinese-free zones – or were once Knacker's lads had finished.

BEYOND THE GRAVE

STAFF at Harrods were given a brief vision of the afterlife last week when proprietor Mr Mohamed Al Fugger announced his burial plans over the PA system shortly before the store opened to the public.

He has asked for his body to be stuffed when he dies then placed in a back room on the top floor of Harrods so that employees can come to him with their problems.





"Look! It's Renaissance Man!"

HOAX WATCH

THE more bizarre practices of the insurance industry have provided a rich vein for newspaper stories, mainly thanks to one Simon Burgess, an insurance broker who is now standing as an independent against Michael Portillo in the Kensington and Chelsea by-election with the slogan: "Vote for me, the rest are tw*ts [sic]".

Burgess runs Goodfellow Rebecca Ingrams Pearson (GRIP), a genuine insurance broker whose main line of business is dull but worthy mortgage protection insurance. Since 1996, however, Burgess has done a nice sideline in hoaxing the national press. "I sell £1,000 worth of genuine policies in the morning and then spend the afternoon on the phone to journalists," he chuckles.

The fake policies that have been the subject of newspaper articles include insurance for prostitutes against loss of earnings through imprisonment, disfigurement or sexually transmitted diseases; insurance against impotence for older men retiring to the coast; and insurance against unwanted Christmas presents with a "socks, underpants and after-shave exclusion clause".

In December 1996 the *Observer* exposed as untrue reports of a $1m pay out by Grip to "Joseph Carpenter... a UFO-spotter supposedly kidnapped by aliens in a Wiltshire field".

This did not prevent sister paper the *Grauniad* reporting in March 1997 that the 39 members of the Californian Heaven's Gate cult who committed suicide to reach the kingdom of God via the Halle Bop comet all held Grip insurance against abduction, impregnation or death by aliens, although a suicide exclusion clause in the small print meant their relatives could not claim the $1m pay out.

Grip has been in the news most recently for its millennium all-risks insurance. On 13 October the *Evening Standard* reported that for a £100 premium: "Millennium revellers worried that things may go wrong on the night can insure against impotence, arrest, eviction from a nightclub or alcohol poisoning."

Fat chance. The only pay back at the start of next year will be the embarrassment doled out to unquestioning hacks when journalist and pal of Burgess Bill Murphy publishes a book about his scams entitled *Immaculate Misconception*.

FOOTBALL FACTS

FORMER Spartist colleagues of sports minister Kate Hoey were fascinated by our report in *Eye* 985 concerning Hoey's apparent confusion about which football team she supports.

These days, as befits paid-up members of "new" Labour's Islington set, she is an Arsenal supporter. Yet, as we pointed out, in a 1994 interview she said she retained her childhood support for Manchester United, sparked by having watched George Best play for Northern Ireland in Belfast. As a wee girl she had had to stand on a stool to be able to see her hero. That must have been quite a sight, especially as George Best's first appearance in Belfast was on 29 April 1964 against Uruguay, when Kate was 18. She must have looked a treat standing on her stool among all the other wee kiddies.

DUMBWATCH

ONE of Janet Street-Porter's first actions on settling into the editor's chair at the *Independent on Sunday* was to enlist the paper's few remaining readers in what she grandly termed "a crusade to maintain standards". Not in the newspaper, of course – with her wealth of experience they could happily trust Janet to take care of that – but in her previous area of expertise, the world of television.

So "Dumbwatch" was born, a weekly opportunity for *Sindie* readers to write in with their complaints about juvenile, lowest-common-denominator pap on telly. But too much staring at the gogglebox seems to have affected some people's memories.

● On 22 August, Jean Crowcroft decried the "assumption that all viewers have the concentration span of a May-fly and need to be visually entertained all the time." She probably wasn't a fan of Channel 4's *Network 7*, with its constantly flashing "info-bar", bright colours, odd camera angles and rule that no item lasted longer than a couple of minutes. The producer? One Janet Street-Porter.

● Meanwhile David Rosen complained about the new-look *Newsnight*. "News broadcasting," he opined, "has reached a new low ebb." Well, not quite. In the late eighties a BBC2 "youth news" programme called *Reportage* attempted to cover the major issues of the day, defined by its producer as "cash-cards, credit, gossip and slime". The show was slammed by TV critics as a disgrace to journalism. As one wrote: "It looks as if when they make a mess of some item or other, or the story just did not stand up, they just throw a purple patch and a zipper caption over it and hope for the best." Who was responsible for this tosh? Step forward, Janet Street-Porter.

● R. Buckland, another *Sindie* reader, was particularly outraged by the "insufferable interviews, silly surveys, repeated 'news' items and zoo concept" of new Radio 2 shows. So he probably didn't take out a cable subscription for L!ve TV, which took "zoo" television to its illogical conclusion by filming a group of unscripted people in a production office for hours on end, mixing in taped items on a loop of constant repetition. It was probably the dumbest (and dullest) thing ever seen on the box. Who was at the helm? Janet Street-Porter.

● The following week saw a similarly outraged missive from Robert Vahey, who professed himself "heartily sick of the dreaded glottal stop, the mania for regional accents, and the appalling contrived mateyness" of presenters. He must yearn for the golden TV age of the seventies, and presenters like, er, Janet Street-Porter on the *Six O'Clock Show*. The job, which she got largely because of her extraordinary cockney accent, consisted of her accosting people in the street to ask them intimate questions about topics such as their underwear. Not a million miles from the "badly spoken, grammar-free presenters" about whom Keith Collins complained to the *Sindie* on 19 September.

● Most of the *Sindie*'s ire, however, was saved for Denise Van Outen's new series, which began at the end of September. "Lowest common denominator television has reached new depths," the Dumbwatch column thundered. The show is "simply sex, sex, sex".

Curiously, this is not a million miles from the mission statement of L!ve TV's flagship Saturday "love night" programme, with its regular "What's your perversion" slot, which featured such televisual gems as semi-naked women smearing baked beans and custard over themselves, and reconstructions of a prostitute's working day. This came not during Kelvin MacKenzie's "news bunny and topless darts" reign at L!ve, but during Street-Porter's brief but colourful period in charge. Fortunately for *Sindie* readers, she was quickly sacked – allowing her to take up the baton on their behalf as a defender of our intellectual heritage.

The Dumbwatch column now seems to have been dropped. It may or may not be coincidence that L!ve TV also pegged out at the same time. But readers shouldn't conclude that Janet has lost her crusading zeal. Last week she wrote a feature in the daily *Independent* advising her old chum Greg Dyke what to do at the BBC: "Purge the place of its obsession with youth and ratings, you're middle-aged like me and we both know far more about how ordinary people want to be entertained and informed than any besuited twentysomething from a media consultancy."

Can this be the esrtwhile queen of Yoof TV, the only begetter of *Def-II*, the woman who insisted that all experts or interviewees appearing on her BBC show *Reportage* must be under 25 years old? Indeedy-doody. Still, although Janet may herself have contributed to the "obsession with youth" which she now deplores, at least she can hold forth about the unimportance of ratings with a clear conscience: in its heyday, L!ve TV was probably the least-watched station in the entire history of British television.

COURT & CIRCULAR

AUSTRALIA's battered republicans must be wondering whom to blame most for their embarrassing defeat in the referendum last weekend. They could start with the family firm of Digger & Son.

Rupert Murdoch's flagship *Australian* newspaper set the pace for the Yes-to-a-republic case long ago, regularly urging readers to get rid of Queen Brenda. For some reason, favourite scion Lachlan then took the message to the world via a "keynote address" to the National Press Club in Washington – not a wise choice of venue to impress the folks down under, most of whom hate "septics" (as in tanks, yanks).

The polls showed the major impact of the House of Murdoch to be a steady and accelerating drift to the No side. And the old Digger's claim that Australians would "lose self respect" if they voted no was seized on with glee by monarchist prime minister John Howard. He angrily reminded voters that Lord Viagra is of course a US citizen who has no business telling Australians anything.

In broadcasting, meanwhile, Howard has been more keen to preserve the empires of existing free-to-air commercial broadcasters such as the two Kerries, Packer and Stokes, who have claimed that relative newcomers like Murdoch's News Ltd shouldn't be allowed to barge in on digital multi-channelling without putting in years of blood, sweat and tears. Digger & Son will thus have to manage on the meagre proceeds of their Foxtel cable channel which has yet to penetrate far into Australia's vast suburbia.

AUSTRALIANS may love our Queen, but they still haven't got the hang of other revered British institutions.

In an article for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, veteran Aussie hack Padraic McGuinness brings his readers up to speed on recent changes at the *Spectator*. "Its editor is Boris Johnson, son of the previous editor, Frank Johnson," he reveals, "and nephew of one of its regular columnists and a former editor of the *New Statesman*, the venerable Paul Johnson, Frank's elder brother."

Can all these Johnsons by any chance be related? Er, no.

DOES someone at Buckingham Palace have a sense of humour?

Close scrutiny of the top-table guests at Brenda's state banquet for President Jiang Zemin reveals a number of characters with "interesting" love lives – including Robin Cook, Lady Irvine of Lairg, Prince Charles, Prince Andrew, Baroness Jay, etc.

And which London diplomat had the honour of joining them on the high table? Why, his excellency the high commissioner for Uganda!

QUEEN TRIUMPHS IN AUSTRALIA FINAL

IN THE TEAROOM

THAT unhappy band of serious Tories who want to have another crack at government are not at all pleased to hear Michael Portillo calling himself a "Hagueite" and promising to behave himself until after the next election.

The only point in Portillo, as they see it, is to get rid of the pisspoor Hague who will never, ever lead them into Downing Street and is sure to balls-up the referendum campaign on the euro. And that, for the Tory right, would mark the end of civilisation as we know it.

The problem is that Portillo has never been a ruthless political operator himself. He's always needed someone else to do the dirty work for him. The role of patron-cum-fixer-cum-schmoozer-cum-arm-twister used to be carried out by David Hart, the heli-borne Suffolk squire and property developer who ran the clandestine end of Thatcher's 1985 battle against the miners from his suite at Claridges (see *Eyes passim*).

Portillo's own efforts at building a political base at Westminster have been confined to sending postcards of doubtful sincerity to backbenchers congratulating them on their speeches. It has not escaped many recipients that Portillo wasn't there to hear the speeches and must have read them up in Hansard – but still, it's the thought that counts. Relations between Hart and Portillo have run hot and cold over the past couple of years, but now there is pressure on the millionaire to get back in the saddle as kingmaker – and pressure on Portillo to let him. Lady Thatcher's intervention here could be decisive; and there's no reason to suppose that there's anything to her party conference chumminess with William Hague that three fingers of the Glenfarclas infuriator wouldn't shift.

All this has to wait until Portillo is back in the shadow cabinet, preferably spearheading the party's support for what gorgeous, pouting, bodice-ripping communications diva Amanda Platell now insists everyone calls the "sterling guarantee". This is not a kitsch commemorative offer from the Franklin Mint, but the Conservative party's flagship policy – the pledge to keep the pound for... er... a few years more at least.

Clever, ironically-minded types like Francis Maude find it hard to use the phrase without collapsing, giggling to the floor; and even the reliably humourless John Redwood verbally implies the inverted commas. Only Portillo, with his impassive Castilian features, has so far passed the audition.

'Urquhart'

OH, YEAH?

Tony Blair promised us, it [the Dome] will be "a celebration so bold, so beautiful, so inspiring that it embodies at once the spirit of confidence and adventure in Britain and the spirit of the future in the world".

— Rowan Moore, *Evening Standard*

ONE of the few ministers not obliged to "eat *merde*" during the beef contretemps with France has been agriculture minister Nick "Newcastle" Brown – that is until the PM overruled Brown, and he grovelled to the French by allowing yet further checks on British beef.

First up to denounce "Newcastle" and suggest, sotto voce, that Brown's job could disappear along with MAFF, to be replaced by a new ministry of rural affairs, was the ever-reliable Peter Riddell of the *Times*. Bruce Anderson, who denounced "Newcastle" in similar terms, followed him shortly in the *Daily Mail*. Yet had the "Brute" realised the identity of those throwing his daily diet of raw meat, he would surely have gallantly come to the aid of the agriculture minister. Meanwhile those foolish enough to contemplate a newly downsized role for Brown, should think again. The former chief whip is not short of friends in the Commons and, best of all, knows where all of the bodies lie.

THE skies around London are set to become even more crowded thanks to John Prescott's department of the environment, transport and the regions (DETR).

The Civil Aviation Authority has granted permission to property developer Wiggins Group to run passenger flights from Manston airport in Kent. Though Manston is 60 miles from the capital, it is to be renamed London Manston and Wiggins' chief executive, Oliver Iny, is hoping Railtrack and Connex will cooperate to cut the journey time from two to one and a half hours.

Could this be the same Oliver Iny who in May was ordered by the chancery division of the high court to pay more than £200,000 when the Mr Jules Sher QC found he had practised deception on two business colleagues?

MEANWHILE publication of the DETR's "action" statement on walking looks more remote than ever.

The National Walking Strategy is referred to in the DETR white paper; and in April a working group, originally set up by Stephen Norris in 1996, sent a draft to the Number 10 policy unit. But despite being mooted for months, it has still not been published.

John "Two-Jags" Prescott's 300-yard chauffeur-driven ride in Bournemouth has apparently put back publication even further. Despite the assurances, it did not even appear in time for a seminar at the environment department last month to promote the strategy.

SOCIAL security minister Alistair Darling has claimed that his proposed incapacity benefit cuts were part of "Labour's manifesto promise for welfare reform" – er, but they weren't. And his refusal to reconsider, despite a Labour backbench rebellion which defied earlier predictions, has infuriated first Lord Jack Ashley, the former Stoke on Trent MP who has spent a lifetime campaigning for the disabled; along with Lord Alf Morris, the first minister for the disabled in the last Labour government; and Tom Clarke, a former Labour spokesman for the disabled.

Joining these august figures is every single disability group in the UK, along with a majority – without the hereditaries – of peers in the House of Lords. So why is Darling sticking to his guns?

The answer is the brooding figure of chancellor Gordon Brown, who having ordered Darling to swing

the axe in the first place will obstinately not allow himself to be dissuaded. The chancellor's behaviour follows a pattern: it was his bright idea to cut benefits for single mothers. And as the public outcry to that mean-minded measure grew, the grip of axe-woman delegate Harriet Harman on her job grew ever more tenuous. When she fell crashing from office, Gordon was nowhere to be seen.

As Darling flounders on the nation's television screens, a pattern reemerges. Gordon is again nowhere to be seen.

AS home secretary Jack Straw continues to chip away at the citizen's fundamental right to a presumption of innocence – we've already lost the right of silence and he's about to end our right to jury trial – the need for a fully independent body to investigate suspected miscarriages of justice has never been greater.

But it seems Straw is determined to stamp his mark on that as well. Members of the criminal cases review commission (CCRC), set up three years ago in the wake of a series of dreadful cases of wrongful conviction, have been told their contracts will not, as originally suggested, be automatically renewed.

Mr Straw wants more women on the panel – there are only two – and more people with first hand experience of cases of wrongful conviction. Given that the original panel was approved by Michael Howard and stacked with former police and prosecutors, that, on the surface, seems very laudable. Except that ministers will apparently vet the original list of candidates and those finally selected for the CCRC.

The reason the CCRC was set up was to take the job of examining claims of injustice away from the home office and ministers, after they so spectacularly kept refusing to refer embarrassing cases like the Bridgewater affair to the court of appeal. And despite many misgivings about the original make-up of the CCRC, it has been fairly rigorous in its duties. With new cases coming in at a rate of four a day, it has also been referring back awkward old chestnuts like the cases of Derek Bentley and James Hanratty.

To ensure there can be no suggestion the new panel will be staffed by "new" Labour cronies, ministers should keep their noses out of the selection process.

LAST July Jack "The (then) Enforcer" Cunningham said the government's new drug treatment orders – where treatment is a condition of punishment – were so successful he was ordering a "significant expansion".

Eye 980 poured scorn on the announcement, pointing out that early results from the drug treatment trials in Liverpool, Croydon and Gloucester suggested that far from providing the solution to the country's drug and crime problems, they were a dismal failure.

Most junkies were passing through the courts unnoticed, and two out of every three who were detected were rejected for treatment programmes after assessment. In the first eight months of the trials only 69 of the thousands of drug-using offenders seen by the courts had been given treatment orders.

Four months down the line, the *Eye* has been proven right. In answer to a parliamentary question, the government has admitted that the total number of drug treatment orders made during an entire year was only 145 – and that more than half the people on them had already been ordered back to court for breaching the terms of the order.

NOBS

by THE 4th EARL OF HUSBAND

HP SAUCE CONTINUED

SHH...IT

THE home office is still determined to throw good taxpayers' money after bad in its pursuit of privatisation.

After the twin cock-ups of the Passport Agency (massive queues at Petty France and 20-week delays) and the immigration centre at Croydon (massive backlog of 70,000 cases and two-year delays), ministers now want a hat-trick with the Prison Service.

They have already wasted about £8m on Quantum 1, the first attempt to create an integrated prison computer system. Now in their determination to lure in such distinguished computer giants as the Sema Group (*Eyes passim*) to install and run the system, they are offering the Prison Service's own IT services management group as part of the deal.

The IT management group of course knows the Prison Service's needs intimately, particularly in relation to security and in scrutinising contracts and looking for value for money in any IT work placed with private companies. One would have thought a £300m project was sufficient draw for any computer giant. No doubt, the extra incentive of chucking in the "computer police" with the contract is the belief that the companies won't be reported when things go wrong.

That doesn't always work, of course. Exasperated probation staff forced to use Crams – the computerised case record system supposed to revolutionise probation work – eventually called in experts from University College, London, to convince the government Crams was a waste of everybody's time and £15m of taxpayers' money.

WORLD OF HYPE

NO business represents the hated forces of conservatism better than PR firm Bell Pottinger.

Lord (Tim) Bell was Lady Thatcher's favourite ad man, and the firm still takes up her favourite causes, like the £200,000 account to run the "Free General Pinochet" campaign.

Odd, then, how enthusiasm for Bell Pottinger has spread all the way to the Labour party and into every nook and cranny of government.

A host of "new" Labour apparatchiks have taken work with the firm. Amanda Clow from Tony Blair's private office; Amanda Francis from Mo Mowlam's; Jack Cunningham's old assistant Cathy McGlynn; Nick Williams from David Clark's office and of course former Labour communications chief Dave Hill all left to take jobs with Bell Pottinger, which also has Labour MP Stuart Bell on the payroll.

As Bell Pottinger has hired key Labour players, so the government machine has hired Bell Pottinger – regardless of any potential conflicts of interest.

In May the competition commission, the potentially much more powerful successor to the monopolies and mergers commission, hired Bell Pottinger to run a "consultation" with industry. Thus a trust-busting, anti-monopoly body, central to Labour's claims to be prepared to get tough with big business, hired a Tory PR firm to ask businesses how they felt about its powers.

Worse still Bell Pottinger represents firms set to be investigated for uncompetitive practices, notably the Milk Marque and Murdoch's BSkyB.

Now London Transport has hired Bell Pottinger to lobby in favour of the privatisation of London Underground. London Transport is wholly owned by the public, with fresh new Labour management in the shape of Malcolm Bates. But the contract means a public sector body has hired a private sector PR firm to lobby for its own privatisation.

Bell Pottinger's links to MPs should help with the most important constituency. After all, this is not a question of persuading the public. The plan is to get the privatisation of the tube past the point of no return before the mayoral election brings a whiff of democracy to the issue.

Bell Pottinger has got into another privatisation with alarming safety aspects. British Nuclear Fuels Ltd has hired Bell's mob to promote the sell off of that well-known, wholly publicly-owned company British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, so again public money is paying for lobbyists to promote privatisation.

CHARITY NEWS

IN scenes reminiscent of a spy movie, a telephone call was made from the ambassador's office at the Kuwaiti embassy in London to a well-known firm of lawyers, Messrs Herbert Smith.

Several hours later a man carrying an unmarked briefcase arrived at Herbert Smith's office, where he handed over $200,000 in fresh dollar bills. The money was then transferred via Herbert Smith's account to that of Indict, an organisation run by Ann Clwyd MP to prosecute those responsible for breaches of human rights in Iraq.

This cloak-and-dagger caper first took place in November 1998. It was repeated in March this year, when another $200,000 was delivered. But the third tranche, which was due in August, never appeared. It seems that the Kuwaiti ambassador is no longer so impressed by Clwyd and her campaign.

He isn't alone. Indict was awarded a budget of $3m by the US congress for this year, but the state department has forwarded only $500,000 of it so far, apparently because of growing doubts about Indict's effectiveness.

Much of the credit for Indict's lavish funding belongs to Ahmed Chalabi, the controversial leader of the Iraqi National Congress, a coalition of anti-Saddam groups. After an energetic lobbying campaign in Washington, it was he who persuaded the US congress to allocate $3m to Indict, to prove that America wasn't "going soft" on Iraq; and in September last year he escorted Clwyd to Washington for negotiations with the state department over the budget.

Once the money started coming through, however, Clwyd sought to marginalise Ahmed and expel those close to him, most notably the academic lawyer who introduced her to Indict in the first place. The people she has brought on to the board of Indict – including the Tory MP Andrew Robathan – seem curiously reluctant to ask what has happened to all the money, which has yielded little except the odd photo-opportunity for Clwyd.

Perhaps the parliamentary human rights group will investigate. Or, then again, perhaps not since the group's chairwoman is none other than Ann Clwyd MP.

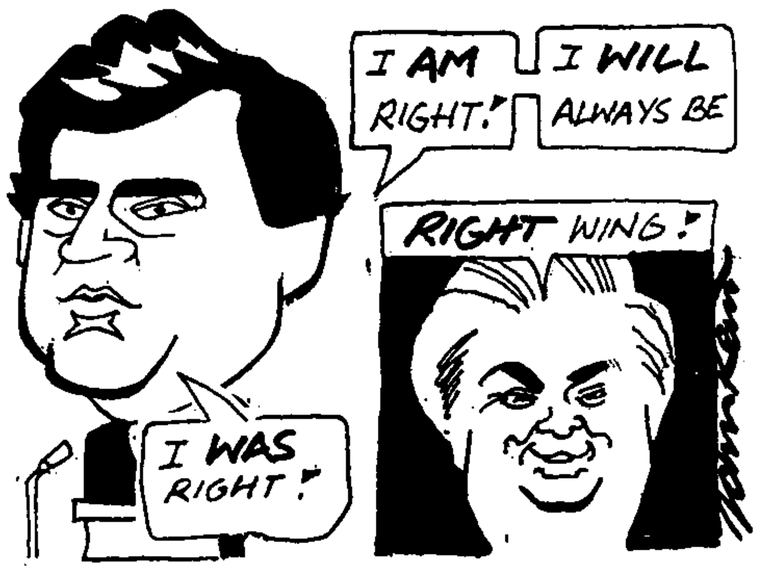
FUND RAISING

WHILE blind trusts which invite anonymous donors to have dinner with the recipients of their largesse are apparently perfectly reasonable, Tony Blair has made it clear he will not countenance funds from overseas. Party funding should be "transparent and it should not be money from abroad, because it is quite wrong".

Obviously, therefore, the $500,000 raised by Gerry Adams from last month's Friends of Sinn Fein dinner – 1,000 Irish Americans paid $500 a head for some chicken and a speech demanding that the British government do something or other – ought to be donated to charity.

However, for fear of offending anyone with the slightest predisposition towards violence, when Mo Mowlam was Ulster secretary she agreed to exempt Northern Ireland parties from the new rules on fundraising. Given that the Unionists and even the comatose SDLP have no hope of getting much money in America, this means Sinn Fein can bury its opponents in dollar checks.

Although Mowlam's successor Peter Mandelson is inclined to go along with the decision to let the money flow in, this position may be about to change – but not because of any fear for the future of Northern Ireland. It will be as a result of quiet pressure from Dublin-based politicians who are beginning to panic as Sinn Fein (despite its tiny



electoral support) starts to swamp the Irish Republic with its propaganda, spending sums that local parties can never hope to match.

ELECTION SPECIAL

AFTER a thorough investigation, the Labour party has decided on its line regarding the dodgy return of 1997 general election expenses submitted by Jack Straw's PPS, Colin Pickthall MP (see *Eye* 987). It goes something like this:

There is actually nothing wrong with the return, described as "little short of a fabrication" in a 4,000-word report by the party's own local auditor, who estimated that actual spending on the election had been more than twice as much as was declared;

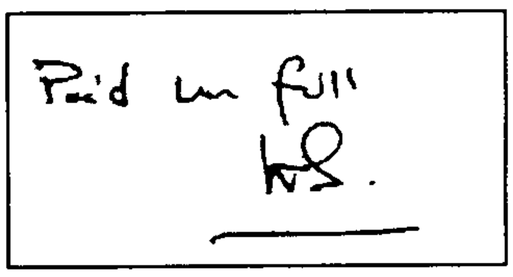
The auditor, Francis Williams (an experienced, highly respected barrister) didn't know what he was doing;

Even if there was anything wrong, er, it was all more than two years ago and no one noticed at the time.

The official spokeswoman of the north-west region of the Labour party, Joanna Parkinson, told the *Eye*: "We have been through the [auditor's] report and we are satisfied that any questions put forward have been answered. The election returns completed by the candidate's agent are accurate and comply with electoral law. There will be no further inquiry." Phew! Huge sighs of relief all round!

The return of election expenses in question was signed by West Lancashire MP Thickpall's former agent, Frank McKenna, who is deputy leader of Lancashire county council and a member of West Lancashire district council, and witnessed by Jean White, a district councillor and magistrate. It contains entries, accompanied by receipted invoices, for two items of expenditure with Flexipress, a small printing company in Ormskirk. One, for £950, concerns the printing of 37,000 introduction leaflets; the other, for £2,100, is for 37,000 election address leaflets. Both invoices carry the hand-written note: "Cheque received. Paid in full", and the signed initials "KS".

The initials are presumably meant to be those of Keith Sergeant, one of the husband-and-wife partnership who own Flexipress. Mr Sergeant, however, runs the workshop while his wife Margaret looks after the books. He never, ever, writes receipts. And Mrs Sergeant has confirmed to the *Eye* that, although the invoices are genuine, she did not write a receipt for either of them. She tells us that the handwriting in question is "definitely not" that of either her or her husband.



Whose hand?

One of the forged receipts

● *See Rotten Boroughs, page 13*

'Backbiter'

OH, YEAH?

"The fact that we're famous and both f***ing loaded doesn't make any difference."

— Chris Evans on his "romance" with Geri Halliwell, *Mirror*

ETV

Gardener Of The Year (BBC2)
Britain's Worst Gardeners (ITV)

LAST week the BBC's long-awaited review of its schedules declared that viewers would be increasingly aware of the difference between BBC and ITV programmes.

The implication was that the public service stuff would always be better and more serious. But anyone tuning in last Friday night – when coincidence offered horticultural series from both sides – would have received a stark illustration of the differences through the unfortunate device of competing mediocrities. These series represented the BBC and ITV traditions at their worst.

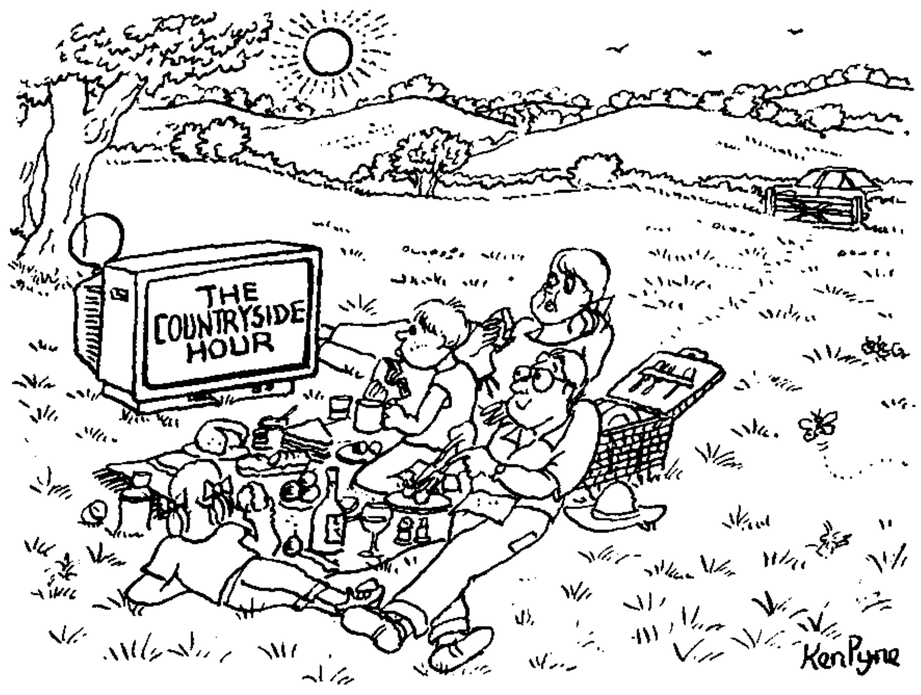
Gardener Of The Year (BBC2) was an unfortunate attempt to fulfil two BBC quotas simultaneously: public access and regional coverage. The flower shows have recently been declared sexy because of the presence among the BBC's presenters of Charlie Dimmock, who doesn't wear a bra, and Alan Titchmarsh, who writes erotic novels. This, however, is the unsexy end of the output.

Hosted by Titchmarsh, *Gardener Of The Year* most resembles a local leek show staged by the bloke in the village who sets the pub quizzes. Inside a kind of giant greenhouse at the National Botanic Gardens in Wales, four South West greenfingers lay out a garden.

They are then marked on such factors as planning and maintainability by regional horticulturalists so earnest they make the panel on *Gardeners' Question Time* sound like Lenny Bruce: "Kathryn, I think your garden oozes style." Old Shagger Titchmarsh remarks coyly: "I'm glad I don't have to judge!" Then the local rose-bores come on like Magnus Magnusson and ask why-bother questions along the lines of: "What is the easiest way of distinguishing between sedges and grasses?" The answer apparently is that sedges rhymes with hedges.

Critics often complain that current programmes are over-formatted – trying to inject irony into every moment – so it's instructive to be reminded of the opposite impulse. Completely lacking in visual or verbal inspiration, the show is as slow and rewarding as watching grass grow. Like the comic novelist who suddenly publishes the novella based on an old Norse poem, Shagger Titchmarsh, you suspect, felt a need to show his serious side as a man of gardens, putting something back at ground level.

The only diverting aspect of viewing *Gardener Of The Year* was



thinking of the recent wider audience drawn to BBC gardening shows by Charlie's knockers tuning in to find that this was the old format and the only tits you got were people from Wales talking about the difference between sedges and grasses.

But at least public service telly at its worst is still better than commercial documentary at its most desperate. **Britain's Worst... Gardeners** (ITV) was a rare third channel foray into Dimmock and Titchmarsh territory. Already tried with memorably terrible drivers and neighbours and others, this format depends on hammed-up stories of embarrassment or disaster.

It was entirely typical of the species that the gardening stories had almost nothing to do with gardening at all. The first exhibit – Carol Holman – wasn't a bad gardener at all. She was never able to get out of the patio door because she was so terrified of frogs. A frog lived at the bottom of her garden. She had allegedly been forced to move house.

If that story had to go anywhere, it should have been in *Britain's Worst... Phobias*. The next segment would equally have had Percy Thrower scratching his head. It concerned nude gardeners. This seemed intended to illustrate one of those school spelling lists featuring similar looking words. These were naturalists who were also naturists. But surely this story – if there absolutely had to be a home for it – belonged in *Britain's Worst... Exhibitionists*.

Next up was a story about a couple who – again and by now almost inevitably – were not bad gardeners but had suffered the misfortune to find an enormous crater one day in the middle of their grass. This proved to be the fault of a local gas company. Well, perhaps a slot might have been found in *Britain's Worst... Council Cock-Ups* but still no subject had been aired which might have been featured on *Gardener's Question Time*. When the next chunk was devoted to showing that "the hedge-trimmer is the second most lethal implement", it became clear that this was a cynical attempt to lure some of the Dimmock and Titchmarsh viewers over to ITV without the bother of actually touching horticulture as a subject. The actorish commentary includes ludicrous lines about "fighting the forces of nature" and how "the garden almost ruined her life".

In its assumption that facts are enough, *Gardener Of The Year* was the worst of BBC2. In its assumption that facts are irrelevant, *Britain's Worst... Gardeners* was the worst of ITV. Manure by any other name would smell as sour.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Wendy Richard Clayderman

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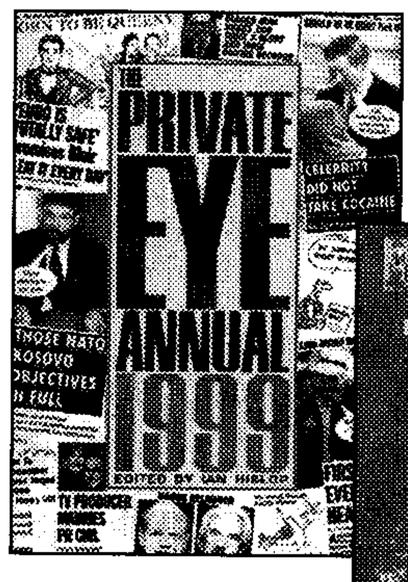

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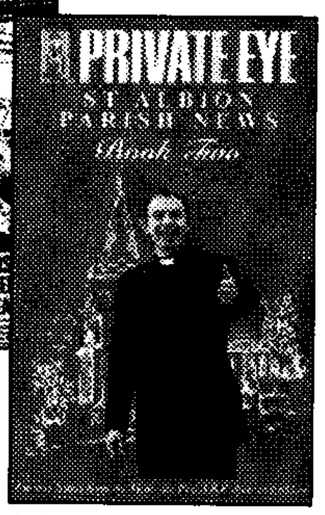

Following last year's best-seller the vicar is back in *Book Two* – £4.99

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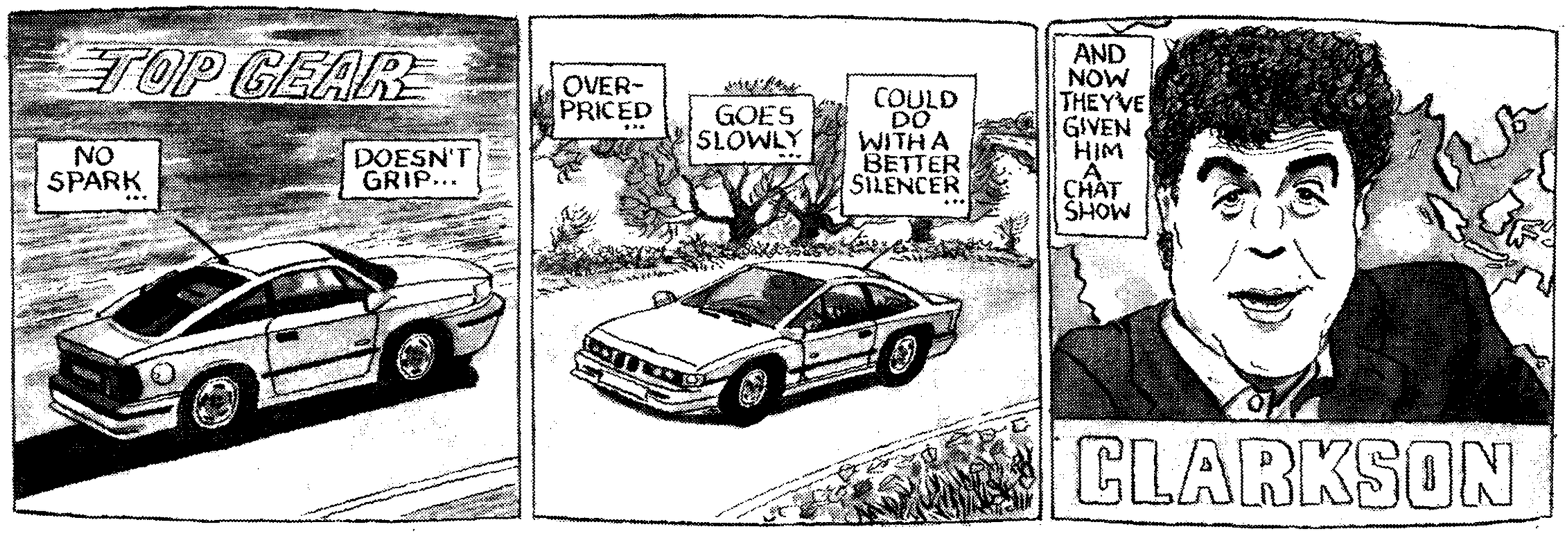


MEDIA NEWS

GREG DYKE's first day at the BBC was uncomfortable for his footer-playing pal John Birt.

Initial disappointment emerged when the photo opportunity designed to show the old and new DGs working "in partnership" produced unhelpful headlines about shake-ups and mass-sackings of suits – thanks to all those carefully leaked rumours that whatever the public façade, the New Boy was really out to ditch Birt's most crucial and disastrous "innovations" as soon as possible.

JOHN BIRT, meanwhile, is clearly worried that there is now more than one song-sheet to sing from.

In the guise of a "Response to the Government" to the Gavin Davies report on the future of the BBC, he has sent a puzzling memo to all staff: "It's now vitally important for each and every one of us to make the argument for the BBC... Please take every opportunity you can during this crucial period to support the case for the full-service BBC in which we all believe."

Greg Dyke will be able to reflect on this issue more than most. After all, as deputy director general *and* director general designate, he'll get the memo twice.

A DARKER mood descended as a growing list of players added their four-penneth worth on the need to "shake up" the legacy of Yesterday's Man.

In no time at all former Birt-loyalist and chairman of BBC governors, Sir Christopher "Pigling" Bland, distanced himself from the *ancien regime* he had done so much to support: "In a fast moving world, a creative organisation like the BBC cannot afford to stand still."

GREY ARIAS

"La Donna e Mobile"

THE *Sunday Times*'s periodical attacks on BBC "extravagance" are dominated by secret agendas – not least Rupert Murdoch's desire to run down Auntie and see BSkyB become the prime force in British TV.

But the most recent "exposé", on outgoing director-general John Birt's "expensive" farewell party, went further in using Tory MP Michael Fabricant as chief prosecution witness. He accused the BBC of "an inappropriate use of public money" and accused Birt of trying "to buy his way into the establishment".

How strange that the *Sunday Times* failed to mention that Fabricant, an MP since 1992, was on the payroll of the BBC as a marketing and programming consultant until 1996. Could it be that since he lost his nice little earner he has become less objective about the BBC? Surely not!

A CORKING exclusive filled three pages of last week's *Mail on Sunday*: "The investigative journalist who exposed Animal Liberation Front terror tactics has been subjected to a horrifying revenge ordeal – taken captive and tortured with a branding iron."

Graham Hall, who won a Bafta award earlier this year for his programme on animal liberationists, had the scars to prove it.

The *Mail* claimed Hall's shocking ordeal was being investigated by West Mercia CID, who had taken a statement from him. Not so, West Mercia police told Monday's *Guardian*: Hall hadn't even informed them of the incident, and the first they knew of it was when they read their Sunday newspapers.

Hall was praised by the *Mail* as "an old hand who has braved death threats from gangs of drug-smugglers, illegal cartels, dog-fighting rings and other criminals". But there is rather more to his CV than that – as West Mercia CID know better than most.

As long ago 1991, when Hall was working for the *News of the Screws*, the *Eye* revealed that he was a convicted burglar. The following year, a court ordered him to repay £10,000 belonging to the International Animal Rescue charity, which he claimed had been stolen from his car. (To date, he has repaid less than £100.) In spite of these setbacks, he was then commissioned by Channel 4 to make "undercover" documentaries – including *Stolen Goods*, transmitted in May 1998, which apparently exposed a Worcester antiques dealer as a "fence" for local criminals.

There was only one slight problem with this scoop: the antiques man, Tim Hinks, was in fact working undercover himself as an informant for West Mercia CID, who at the time were investigating none other than Graham Hall. Hinks claims that he told C4 about this, but the channel went ahead with the programme anyway. He then protested to the Broadcasting Standards Council. In March this year the BSC upheld his complaint, condemning Hall's film for "unfairness and unwarranted infringement of privacy". Although C4 executives had good reason to suspect that Hinks was working for the police, they still "chose to identify and convict [him] on television without checking further". Nor did they tell viewers that the film-maker himself had criminal convictions for theft.

The film also neglected to mention Graham Hall's previous association with Hinks, over a counterfeit money operation. In 1994, again working under CID instructions, Hinks gave Hall £8,000 to buy fake £20 notes. The money was never seen again.

LUVVIES

"It was a dangerous, exciting adventure to do the film: Sam Miller's first feature; nudity, climbing, a love story; line-dancing... all these dangerous elements. I've done nude scenes before – in fact in my first telly play I was a naked green Venusian – but emotional nudity is the most dangerous thing you can do."

PETE POSTLETHWAITE
Time Out

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

JAZZ FM, broadcasting to Greater London and north-west England, seems to be having trouble living up to its name.

As jazz leaves by the backdoor, in through the front come ex-Radio 1-ers with their Smashie & Nicey culture. First, Tony Blackburn with a weekend soul show; now, breakfast in the north-west is served by Mike Read – in association "with Duerr's traditional English Marmalade".

Not rough cut, presumably, but something bland and tasteless to go with Read's mix of "smooth jazz and soul" – or hotel lobby muzak and cheesy 70s disco.

Read's arrival as a musical mercenary via Radio 1 and Classic FM, sums up Jazz FM's descent from a music-led to a "personality"-led station. It wasn't so long ago that his now fellow presenter Mike Chadwick, distinguishing Jazz FM from other UK niche stations like Classic FM, insisted: "We'd not have Mike Read for a start".

Plugged In

"The Villa must be the best TV dating game ever!"
GARRY BUSHELL
***Sun* TV pundit**

"The Villa must be the best TV dating game ever!"
Trailer on Sky One
for Sky show, *The Villa*

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

STAFF at the BBC's almost defunct international news channel BBC World smell a rat after the recent announcement that half their number will soon be out of a job.

While programme editors who oversee the dreary diet of "news" have been deployed elsewhere, all other hacks have been told to fend for themselves.

Amazingly, BBC World's boss Rachel Atwell and her various sidekicks are staying put, although insiders ask why the BBC doesn't simply come clean and end the misery of the ill-conceived channel that was only created on the back of the CNN's display during the Gulf war.

Not that BBC news supremo Tony Hall is losing any sleep: he is positively thrilled with the way attempts to save the channel have fallen flat. While the NUJ has shown over BBC World that it does not have the stomach for a fight, Hall is making no secret of the fact that the unwieldy BBC One Breakfast programme is next in the accountants' firing line.

Hall's plan is for the morning slot to be filled instead by the equally awful, but crucially much cheaper News24. By securing a foothold on the BBC 1 daytime schedule, News24 will significantly boost its audience figures and so justify Hall's decision to champion a news channel few want to watch.

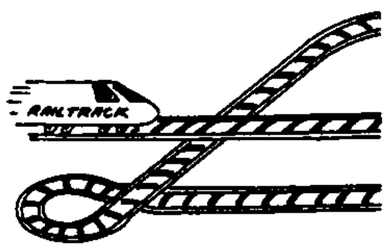
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED THIS JOJOBA AND COCOA BUTTER FACIAL SCRUB?
NO, BUT I'LL TAKE THREE
HOW ABOUT THIS GINSENG AND BERGAMOT INTENSE CLEANSER?
OH GO ON THEN
ISLINGTON PET SHOP
YOU KNOW, YOU REALLY SPOIL THAT DOG, JEZ

SIGNAL FAILURES

Railtrack backpedals



CONSIDERING the private rail companies have never put money before safety — which, of course, has improved steadily since privatisation — the backpedalling since the Paddington crash has been remarkable.

As recently as last year the *Eye* was rebuked by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) for daring to suggest that rail safety had been eroded by fragmentation and privatisation. Well, if the system was in such good shape, why has the HSE suddenly needed to issue a flurry of improvement notices, including ones on Central Trains and Northern Spirit for inadequate briefing procedures?

While praise was heaped on the emergency services after the Paddington crash, little attention was paid to the actions of staff on the Great Western train. It was fortunate that there was a passenger on the train who was a rail worker, so the guard had some help. The guard delegated to this passenger the task of running back along the tracks and ensuring no other trains would run into the blazing wreckage; meanwhile the guard carried out other pressing duties on board. Both merited credit.

In an emergency, train drivers have traditionally been required to leg it up the tracks ahead to stop oncoming trains while the guard ensured nothing would run into the back of their train. Shortly before the Paddington crash, though, Railtrack changed the rulebook to reduce the guard's importance in an incident. "The rules require the guard to contact the driver immediately, and for the guard to agree with the driver whether help is required with the provision of emergency protection or not," explains Railtrack. There's just one minor flaw: in the Paddington crash both drivers were dead, and in other incidents the driver may be unconscious, injured or traumatised or could have left his cab before a collision. Seeking authorisation from the driver for obvious emergency actions could waste valuable seconds or minutes for the guard.

Many staff believe the rail industry shifted safety responsibilities from guards to drivers as a prelude to replacement of guards by ticket inspectors — low-paid people from union-free security agencies who have minimal safety training. The staff must surely be wrong — as money never comes before safety on the privatised railway, does it?

The Paddington crash showed the value of having as many safety-trained people as possible on hand during an emergency; and now Railtrack wants to revise the revised rulebook with uncharacteristic haste. "Had the new rules not already been introduced I would, in the current circumstances, have suspended their introduction," said Railtrack safety director Rod Muttram late last month. Railtrack made the original amendment without consulting staff and now wants the daft new rules about guards to be revised before the inquiry scrutinises them.

Railtrack's backpedalling is mirrored by the government, which only a few months ago had no intention of stripping Railtrack of its responsibility for safe railway operation. That view changed quickly after Paddington (see *Eye* 987) but it remains to be seen if an independent safety authority will be up and running in six months' time — a realistic target for a government determined to act quickly.

Transport supremo John Prescott has softened his tone on the thorny issue of automatic train protection (ATP), estimated to cost £1bn. On 6 October, the day after the Paddington crash, Prescott gave the impression ATP would be installed rapidly when he said: "I want the best safety system as quickly as I can get it, and £1bn is not a big consideration to achieve." But less than a month later, on 25 October, Prescott issued a press release describing safety actions agreed at his "rail summit" including "identifying the means to accelerate the development programme for ATP systems" — not quite the same as installing the best system quickly.

Perhaps Prescott should ask himself if he really wants to go down in history as another Cecil Parkinson – the last government minister to imply money would not stand in the way of ATP before ATP was shelved for financial reasons.

PRESCOTT'S rail-safety "summit" was designed to create for public consumption the cosy image of a contrite rail industry turning over a new leaf. But Railtrack, with its usual crassness, didn't waste any time destroying the fruits of all that careful spin doctoring.

Just after last month's summit Railtrack chief executive Gerald Corbett had said: "We have to do a damn sight better." The summit, in his view, was an example of the sort of joined-up thinking the industry had previously lacked. Prescott agreed, saying: "We need to get away from the blame culture of the past to a national safety culture."

Three days later Railtrack announced it was appealing against a safety enforcement notice relating to the notorious signal SN109 as the notice supposedly implied Railtrack was partly to blame for the Paddington crash. Railtrack "emphatically denied" breaching any safety regulations — in other words, someone else should carry the can.

The appeal was an important delaying tactic because the notice required Railtrack to spend money on safety measures. Last week's announcement of yet another increase in Railtrack profits and dividends shows that Corbett is indeed doing "a damn sight better" – though largely for his shareholders.

'Dr B. Ching'

Down on the Farm

AT THE recent conference of the British Veterinary Association there was widespread gloom about the rapid decline in farm work. But despite headlines such as "Vets fighting to stay afloat" (*Farmers Weakly*, 8 Oct), it's not all bad news. There may be less work, but the incomes of those in large animal practice are higher than ever.

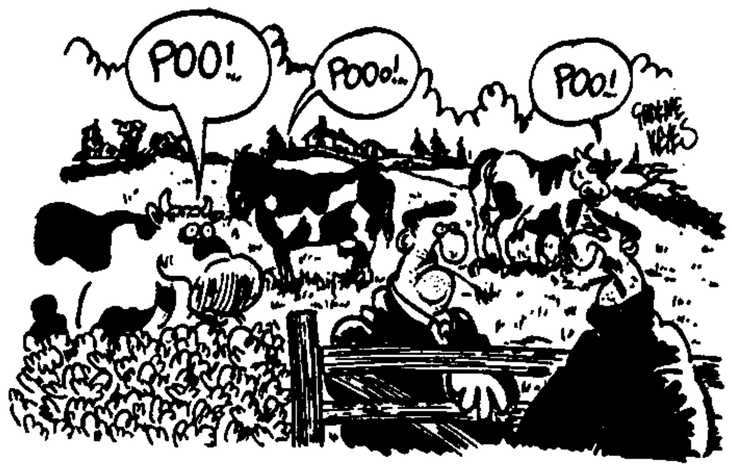
There are those in farming, like one of Gumboot's neighbours, who claim that vets are a useless bunch of greedy drug-peddlers. This is most unfair. We know of cases where animals seen by a vet have actually recovered – sometimes at a cost which is below the value of the animal. (Not sheep, pigs, calves or beef cattle of course, none of which would justify a vet's visit).

As for greedy, well, some farmers just don't realise how much it costs to maintain the standard of living to which all professionals are nowadays entitled. The vet Gumboot uses, for example, charges a reasonable £1.26 per minute, plus of course a visit fee of £20 and then the drugs. All in all £120 an hour is not a lot.

And farm animals need drugs – lots and lots of drugs, according to the vets. Turnover on large animal work per vet is £130,000, of which £37,000 is fees and £93,000 is medicines. Because most animal drugs are "prescription only", vets have a monopoly and are deeply worried about losing it. Still, no vet would ever prescribe a drug unnecessarily just because they can make a huge and easy profit.

Or would they? Now that public interest has at last awakened on this matter, it appears that the veterinary profession has a number of questions to answer. Over-use of antibiotics in farming, for which vets are by definition responsible, is a serious threat (unlike BSE) to human health through the selection of resistant bacteria. Vets have supported factory farming systems by helpfully prescribing in-feed antibiotics. They actively promote drug use and operations on perfectly healthy animals in the name of scientific farming. In fact, wherever intensive management is abusing animals vets can be found in there up to their armpits.

'Gumboot'



"What 'ave you been feeding zose cows, Marcel?"

DOING THE ROUNDS

AS THE Bristol inquiry hots up for parents and lawyers, with the publication of definitive and appalling statistics and the imminent arrival of key witnesses to try to explain them, much of the media and medical profession are suffering from "Bristol fatigue".

The fact that death rates for child heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary between 1989 and 1995 were, on average, twice that of other units and the worst in the country for every operation — most significantly for babies under 90 days — didn't merit much attention.

Among Bristol doctors, opinions long ago polarised between the over 45s (Bristol was a systematic failure at every level and it is horribly unfair to blame it on two surgeons of "unimpeachable moral integrity"); and the under 45s (the surgeons were given plenty of warning signs to stop, made the wrong decisions to carry on and must now carry the can for it).

These opinions are so deeply held it is doubtful the public inquiry will do anything to bring the sides together. So it's left to members of the public to ask the questions that matter. As one *Eye* reader puts it:

Dear MD, Could you please tell me why it has taken until day 71 of a public inquiry to tell us what the Eye did over seven years ago (ie that Bristol was not the place to send your children for heart surgery)? And could the same thing be happening again somewhere now? Or will we only find out in 2006?

Yours impatiently, R. Jones, Bristol.

To be fair to the inquiry, its statistical analysis was far more rigorous than M.D.'s efforts (ironically, the *Eye*'s early figures were actually very kind to the surgeons) and many of the parents who campaigned so hard for a public inquiry now feel vindicated in doing so. But the fact remains that 71 days into the inquiry, there has been no evidence to suggest that mechanisms are in place to stop Bristol happening again — except in Bristol.

Here, audit is done prospectively (ie as the operations are done) and tracks patients for at least 30 days after discharge, and in some cases up to a year. It therefore provides a very comprehensive picture of how the surgical team is doing and is freely available to the public on the internet (www.ubht.co.uk). Bad results could not remain hidden for long.

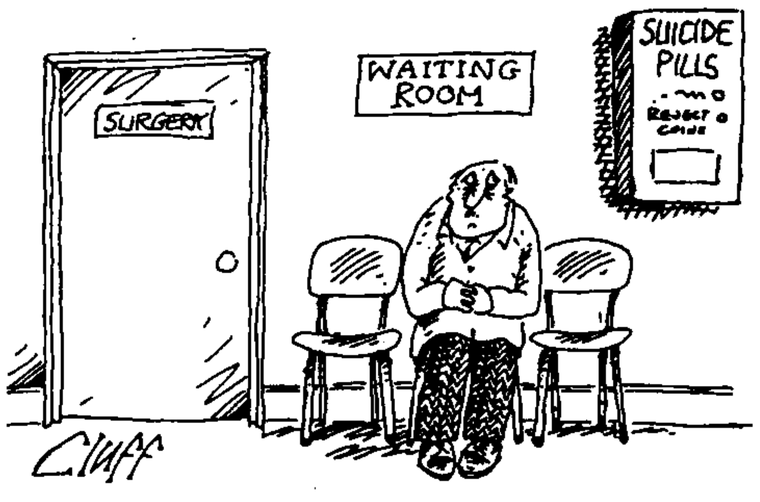
But Bristol is unique in this regard. No other paediatric heart surgery unit has devoted the modest resources needed to conduct such open audit. Even in adult heart surgery, where audit has been going for much longer, 10 out of the UK's 35 units failed to submit data to the latest Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons (SCTS) audit (*Eyes passim*).

Maria Shortis, a Bristol parent, has founded CDCA (Constructive Dialogue for Clinical Accountability) to campaign for compulsory, published, prospective audit. She has spoken to a senior cardiothoracic surgeon who admitted that "Bristol was an avoidable tragedy" and that there is currently "nothing to stop it happening again". Another confided that "other Bristol-type scenarios" would probably reach the public domain.

But not until long after the event. If medical self-regulation continues in secret, it takes a huge whistleblowing effort and 10 years of cover-up and cock-up before the public learns the truth. Last month, the audit commission published *Critical to Success*, a report into the quality of care in intensive care units in England and Wales. Death rates vary greatly, with some units having thrice the average mortality. Do we know the good ones? Do we know the bad ones? Do we have any guarantee that the bad ones will be sorted out? Do we buggery. It had to be kept a secret "to encourage units to participate". Whatever happened to freedom of information?

● CDCA can be contacted at 101636.1720@compuserve.com

M.D.



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

LAMBETH WALKIES

TOWARDS the end of last month staff at Lambeth town hall received an e-mail asking them to make sure all offices were left unlocked over the weekend to enable Cable & Wireless to install a new telephone system.

With so much sensitive information stored in the building, such as papers relating to various child abuse inquiries (see *Eyes passim*), it was to be expected that TeamLambeth, responsible for security, would have been extra-vigilant.

Inevitably, on the Monday morning it was discovered that four computers, three fax machines, one video and one packet of Planters peanuts had been stolen over the weekend, plus some less valuable items such as the Tories' local election strategy. The thieves left a human turd behind.

Despite the presence of CCTV cameras throughout the town hall, Inspector Knacker's investigations look like *getting nowhere. The cameras* didn't have any film in them.

LANCS OUTSIDER?

FRANK McKENNA, deputy leader of Lancashire county council, has been telling people he has been cleared over the dodgy general election expenses affair detailed in recent issues of the *Eye* (see HP Sauce for the latest instalment).

He now intends to challenge for the candidacy of the safe Westminster seat of Liverpool West Derby, currently held by veteran Labour MP Bob Wareing, who is facing deselection.

The political future looks less rosy for Francis Williams, the barrister who wrote the damning report on the finances of the West Lancashire constituency Labour party, summarised in *Eye* 987. His reward for his diligence has been to be removed from the panel of possible Labour party candidates for West Lancashire district council.

Quite why he should wish to belong to that particular body is a bit of a mystery. One Labour councillor, Bob Pendleton, was deselected last week after allegedly making racist remarks, which he denies, about two Asian voluntary workers. Another, Gary Allen, has resigned after being interviewed for a second time by police investigating alleged housing benefit fraud in the Skelmersdale area.

With police at last taking an interest in the West Lancashire constituency Labour party's finances, Mr Allen is unlikely to be the only member of West Lancs district council to receive a visit from Inspector Knacker in the weeks to come.

KOP THIS

LIVERPOOL is the only city outside London to have more than one team in the football premiership. Both Everton's ground at Goodison and Liverpool FC's Anfield home are surrounded by narrow streets of old terraced houses. Both clubs have been toying for years with two development options – either move their grounds to the outskirts of the city to enable better access for cars, or hope that the city council will develop the area around their existing grounds, with the same effect.

In recent weeks Anfield residents have been canvassed by the council for their views on the future of the area. Unknown to them, however, and prior to the "consultation", the council had already drawn up redevelopment plans. When residents got wind of this, they organised two heavily attended meetings in a local pub. Things got so heated that a local councillor, Joe Kenny, was assaulted. The anger stemmed from the belief that the "consultation" was cosmetic, and that the area's fate had already been decided. Councillors deny any knowledge of such plans – said to involve the creation of a 66,000-seat stadium and then demolition of 1,000 homes. They blame former chief executive Peter Bounds for keeping them in the dark.

Concern has also been expressed about two men with Scottish accents who have been allegedly knocking on Anfield doors and offering residents sums of up to £35,000 to sell up. Locals would like to know who they are - and how they got the idea that there are impending compulsory purchase orders on old, run-down properties that in normal circumstances would be almost impossible to sell.

● **Parents who entrust the care of their toddlers to the Wandsworth Primary Play Association (WPPA), need not fear that their children will be found roaming the streets of the Tories' flagship "brighter borough". Last month Carol Griffiths, who until recently was herself employed by WPPA as a nursery worker, went to collect her 17-month-old daughter, Kaeleen, from the Doddington under-5s nursery. She found her little girl tethered to a table leg with a piece of cloth, as were three other toddlers.**

After an inquiry by Wandsworth council two members of staff, including the manager of the Doddington nursery, were transferred to another nursery, having been found guilty of "poor practice".

WPPA boss Jean Crowley nevertheless insisted that the tethering allegations were unfounded. And Ms Griffiths is now in a position to keep a much closer eye on little Kaeleen — having been sacked as a nursery worker by the WPPA.

WORDS FOR WINDOWS

"ACTIONS speak louder than words," proclaimed Durham city council leader Maurice Crathorne in a recent issue of the local government mag *Municipal Journal*.

He was talking about the "modernisation" programme of the Association of Direct Labour Organisations, of which he is chair. Mr Crathorne certainly has been an action man as far as Durham's own direct labour department is concerned. Systematically run down, with increasing amounts of work put out to private firms, it incurred a £492,000 loss last year.

Of course councils put all sorts of work out to private tender. It all helps keep the local economy going, doesn't it? Not in Durham's case. Last year the council wanted to order a quantity of UPVC double-glazed windows. Of four tenders received, the two lowest were from a local firm, Key Windows, and from Anglian Windows in Norwich. Key Windows said they would do the job for £148,100; Anglian undercut this offer by £88.20, and on 13 October 1998 were awarded the contract. The insignificant sum saved was far outweighed, however, by the expenses claims of seven councillors, including Maurice Crathorne, who had spent the night in Norwich in August while on a "fact finding" visit to, er, Anglian Windows.

PS: In April this year Key Windows of Durham went bust with the loss of 100 jobs.

COCKING A SNOOKS

PITCH 67 in London's Petticoat Lane market has been dubbed "the Golden Pitch". The stall has been spray-painted gold and the ground marked out in gold by traders disgusted that this small plot of land has cost council tax payers more than £500,000 over the past decade.

Much of the dosh was paid out by Tower Hamlets council to stallholder Terry Smith, a trader in ladies' underwear, to avoid a case in the high court last July. In 1994 the council reduced Smith's licence from six days a week to two, claiming he regularly left his stall unattended (he was, in fact, merely making trips to the loo).

An inquiry into the running of the market by John Hendy QC found that when the Lib Dems controlled the council they had tried to change the rules to give the pitch to former Lib Dem councillor Betty Wright. A second report by district auditor Kash Pandya concluded that Smith had been subject to a systematic campaign of harassment by council officers.

Lib Dem councillor John Snooks, severely criticised in both reports into the affair, now sits on the council's scrutiny committee. One of its duties is, er, the overseeing of markets.

Pseuds Corner

Sitting round the table discussing storylines, the Street writers call on a wide range of sources for their ideas. The inspiration for Rita handing the Kabin over to Sharon, for example, came from Shakespeare's King Lear.

"Coronation Street: Behind the Scenes"
Daily Mirror

The Meta Society
Concept and performance art, digital vandalism, memes, Alife, minimalism, consciousness, recursion, recursion (recursion), self-reference, superrationality. This society is intended to act as a forum for a diverse selection of projects. Previous ventures have included online art, a recursive book ('Reviews of this Book'), digital minimalist music and performance. There are no fixed meetings, events or membership fee; there are not even any members. But if you want to meet like-minded people for inspiration and collaboration, then simply do what they would do.

Cambridge University Societies Directory 1999

It's like being a god half of the time and murderer the rest of the time. You're creating a universe in the studio. You're trying to make something new in the world one minute, and then you're cutting up and lacerating it. You're tearing it. Sweating like a pig. Totally soaked. Painting is killer shit. It's kill or be killed.

JOHN HOYLAND
Guardian

Helen believes that Boots, her four-year-old Persian, dances so well with her because they share a lot in common. "He's a Scorpio and I have the sun in Pisces, so there's a good deal of karmic support. Also our auras usually match, and numerologically we're both Eights, which makes for a strong psychic bond." However, to ensure the correct energy balances, Helen finds that adjustments to the physical environment may be necessary. "I had the Feng-Shui catman in last year, and he had me place the cat-door in the living-room wall instead of the back door. That realignment really got Boots bunny hopping and stomping properly again."

From BURTON SILVER and HEATHER BUSCH – "Dancing with Cats"

A fragmented collection of disparate dancing bodies found and reconstituted, surfacing and receding, resulting in unexpected juxtapositions and poignant interludes.

The Collection, "a digital dance video by foreign bodies dance theatre"

There is a semiotics to the fridge, a sexiness, a je ne sais quoi must-have quality that puts them in the same category as, say, a Jill Sander suit, a dirty weekend, a Lulu Guinness bag.

REGGIE NADELSON
Financial Times
"How To Spend It" magazine

We just let it come out the way it wanted. Sometimes it's better not to think, you know. Musicians work by intuition and instinct, not by forward planning or front-lobe scoping... We're like blind men throwing spaghetti at walls. We don't know what we're doing. That's a given.

JOE STRUMMER
LA Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Jo Williams, Ed Wild, Joanna Guthrie, Will Young, David Burton, Tom Howe, Dave Healy.

£10 paid for entries

Letters

Cover story

Sir,

I'm afraid I'm going to have to consider cancelling my subscription if you continue to print letters from people who have been offended by a Private Eye cover, and subsequently decide to cancel their subscription.

Do you ever stop to think how hurtful and embarrassing it must be for their families and friends when they find out their loved ones do not possess a sense of irony?

Yours,
PETER W,

Vocalist of the band The Park.

Censor sensitivity

Sir,

Helpful though it would be in my search for exciting new job opportunities in North Korea, I feel I must decline the honour of being named "censor-in-chief" of the South China Morning Post which you batted my way in your last issue (Eye 987).

The sacking of a cartoonist by my predecessor more than four years ago; the moving (not dismissal) of a journalist two years ago after his column went downhill; my interventions at a business lunch to object to the rewriting of history by the columnist in question, who now seems to have added you to his list of pen pals. That's hardly the stuff of the Big Red Pencil Award, I fear, so I am returning the trophy in the hope that you may find a more deserving recipient.

I'd rather stick with the thanks I received from Martin Lee, chairman of the Democratic Party here, for my defence of press freedom in Hong Kong, and the award by Asian publishers to the Post as the best English-language newspaper in the region with a special reference to my own position as a bell-wether of press freedom. Not to cite a letter from the aforesaid columnist congratulating me on the "fabulous" paper I was editing, and a piece by him earlier this year (18 months after he had not been dismissed) speaking of the "trusty, fearless South China Morning Post".

As for the arrival of the Michelin man editor which you predict, I already have a model Bibendum on my desk: he stands on a spring, bounces about, but never keels over.

Yours,
JONATHAN FENBY,

Via e-mail.

Who gives a Puck?

Sir,

Sorry to be a pedant, but Square Eye's otherwise commendable broadside against the slackening of standards in factual television (Eye 988) was somewhat marred by his or her belief that Ariel puts a girdle "round about the earth" in The Tempest, when of course it is Puck who makes such a claim in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Best wishes,
TIM KNAPMAN,

Via e-mail.

Harrow, Sailor!

Sir,

Having the honour to share my alma mater with Michael Portillo, I feel I should reassure your readers that the only reason our Old Boys' Association is called The Old Gaytonians is that Harrow County School for Boys (as was) is in Gayton Road, Harrow.

Yours sincerely,
MICK BOGGIS,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike

Winner

Cobbett

Sir,

Am I alone in recognising a resemblance between William Cobbett and Michael Winner? One thought that the working classes deserved three square meals a day of bread and gruel. The other was, of course, a nineteenth-century social reformer.

IAN SPRING,

Farnham, Surrey.

Mullin it over

Sir,

I must defend my old colleague Chris Mullin MP from your foul accusation (Eye 988) that he was once left wing. Chris was a Liberal at Hull University, and later when I shared an office with him for four years at Tribune (1978-82) I never heard him express the slightest interest in political ideology — nor indeed show any knowledge or understanding of it. He was working selflessly through the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, alongside the Militant Tendency and others, to create the centralised power structures that would one day allow New Labour to conquer. His government post is justly deserved.

CHRIS JONES,

Luton, Beds.

Self-employed con tract

Sir,

In HP Sauce (Eye 986) you state that "many self-employed IT contractors effectively work full-time for a company and enjoy all the benefits that entails".

*If those benefits include: Not receiving sick pay, providing your own pension, not getting paid leave, paying for your own training, not being eligible for maternity leave, not being eligible for redundancy payments, paying employee's NI **and** employer's NI, your statement is true.*

Otherwise it's not.

With love,
REINGA CAPA

Via e-mail.

Trains of thought

Sir,

I refer to Eric Hall's letter (Completely loco - Eye 988).

One of the central tenets of "Red for Danger" (incidentally, my copy is attributed to L.T.C. Rolt) is that no system of signalling or train control can ever remove the potential for human error. The book is a sad, though fascinating, litany of successive instances of lapses of judgement on the part of railwaymen conspiring to undermine whatever state of the art security system was in place. The scope of the book extends from the dawn of railways to the mid-50s, but it could easily be extended to encompass accidents up to and including Paddington. There has never been an accident-free golden age of rail travel, and it is possible that there never will be.

MICHAEL BAXANDALL,

London.

Sir,

Automatic train control (ATC) worked well, and its successor AWS still does. Rather than looking at high tech gizmos to exclude the possibility of human error (and none of these could have prevented the Clapham disaster), the time and money would be better spent investigating such areas as staff morale, discipline, working conditions and chain of command. I fear, however that the high-profile technological fix has more PR value both to government and the privatised industry as a tangible sign that "something is being done" about rail safety.

JOHN BLAKEY,

Denmark.

Sir,

It is pretty pathetic that the Eye, which resisted the post-Diana dictatorship of grief, is now so actively orchestrating hysteria about rail safety. As one of Connex South Central's captive "customers", I have many complaints about the service for which I pay through the nose, but I also had many complaints about the same service in the not-so-golden age of BR. I also know that, pre- and post-Paddington, I am 10 times less likely to be killed commuting in a dirty, decrepit slam-door carriage through the signalling black spot of Norwood Junction than if I get in my car. I don't notice the Eye lashing itself into a frenzy of outrage about the dozens of road traffic deaths every week. Besides, if the only safe railway network is a nationalised one, wouldn't Dr B. Ching sound less of an opportunist if he also advocated nationalising all UK airports and all the airlines which overfly the UK, so as to minimise the risk of a mid-air collision?

Yours derisively,
MICHAEL McGOWAN,

Hong Kong.

Ambulance chasing

Sir,

M.D.'s item on driver training for ambulance staff was, uncharacteristically for him, confused on a number of points and highly suspect on others. Firstly, driver training is part of the basic certification requirement for NHS ambulance technicians and is, therefore, compulsory. It is adapted from roadcraft and teaches staff to take a systematic approach to the hazards they encounter on the road. It also deals specifically with speed, safety and patient comfort.

Despite the impression given in an earlier M.D. column, private operators do not carry out 999 work anywhere in the UK. Where they have qualified ambulance technicians or paramedics on their staff, these have been trained by the NHS. However, their work does not normally involve them in driving on public roads at emergency speed.

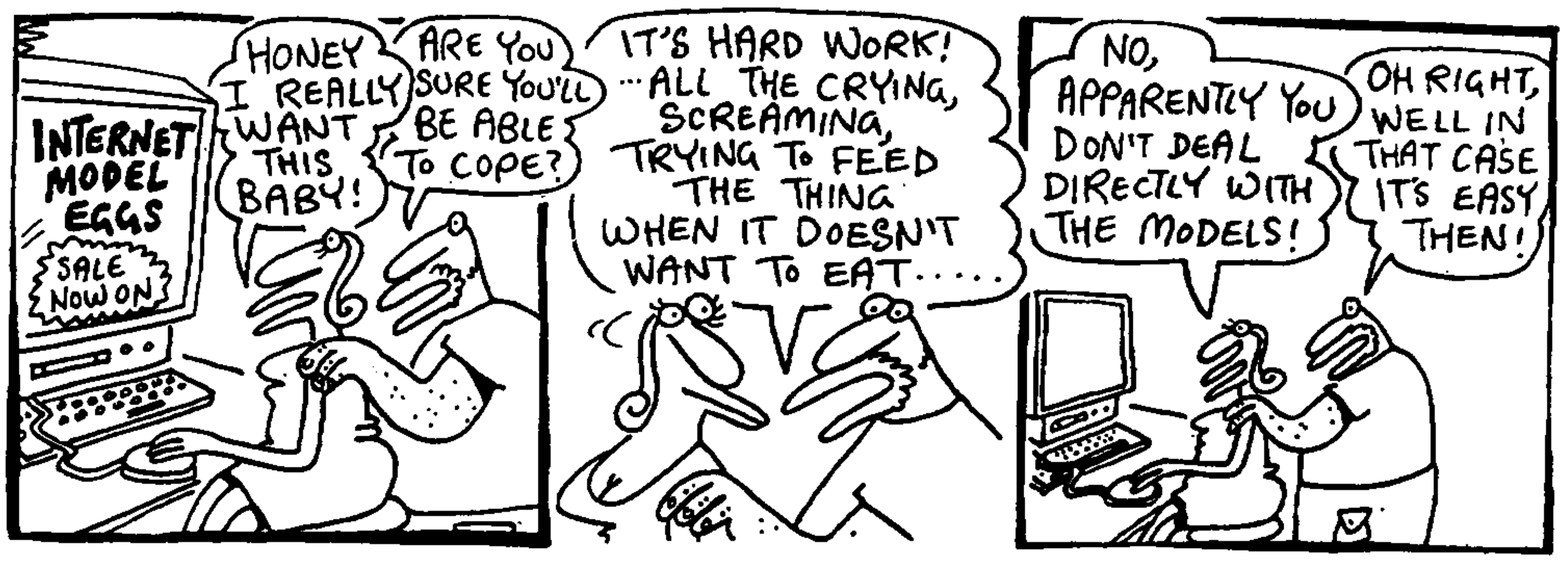
Finally, in future, before M.D. repeats alarming statistics such as that claiming a private ambulance company to be "900 percent safer" than a local ambulance service which responds to 54,000 emergencies a year, perhaps he will provide a little more context and demand of his source a lot more rigour.

ALAN MURRAY,

Dorking, Surrey.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


INTERNET MODEL EGGS
SALE NOW ON
HONEY I REALLY WANT THIS BABY!
ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO COPE?
IT'S HARD WORK! ...ALL THE CRYING, SCREAMING, TRYING TO FEED THE THING WHEN IT DOESN'T WANT TO EAT.....
NO, APPARENTLY YOU DON'T DEAL DIRECTLY WITH THE MODELS!
OH RIGHT, WELL IN THAT CASE IT'S EASY THEN!

I-SPY

Sligo, Ireland

Submitted by Dan Howison. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Russell athletic

Sir,

A couple of jazz-related points. Why does everyone seem to be gunning for Russell Davies these days? Maybe he does look a little like Knife & Packer's Quin, but his "Jazz Century" (and I've heard most of it so far) is excellent. I don't think we should be knocking somebody who is an (almost) lone voice of decent music in a BBC obsessed with big record companies' pop playlists, and somebody whose presentation of jazz and close-to-jazz music over the years has been thoughtful without over-intellectualising the music.

Yours in a duffel coat,
DAVID FREEDMAN,

Berkhamsted, Herts.

Mr Eddie Lake, the popular escaped goat for the wrongs of councillors and officers who shirked their duty and are still in place, was the best friend that Mr D J Tottenham has had. *Abergele & St Asaph Visitor*

Positive vetting

Sir,

Muckspreader, whether "old", "new" or recycled, regularly pads his column with horror stories about the indignities piled on the hapless British meat industry by incompetent, illiterate Spanish vets. With an xenophobic zeal, Muckspreader faithfully trots out urban myths created by an industry which is enraged by having to submit, at last, to genuine inspection and supervision (instead of the previous cosy relationship with corrupt local government).

Earlier this year the Veterinary Public Health Association visited Spain to look at Spanish standards of veterinary supervision of slaughterhouses. The VPHA is not connected to the UK government, or to the dreaded EU commission. A summary of its findings is published in the "Veterinary Record" 11/9/99, p.323. As your readers, and Muckspreader(s) are probably not familiar with this journal, I quote some of their conclusions:

"The abattoir, cutting plants and stores were of the highest standards of construction and hygiene"; "we could not fault their competence"; "hygiene standards were as good as the best in the UK".

Yours professionally,
EUROVET,

Via e-mail.

Missing link

Sir,

Re: Down on the Fish Farm. Once again "Old Trout" has been permitted to refute in print the findings of qualified marine biologists, with absolutely no scientific evidence to back up his claims. The reason being there is none. There is no scientific evidence whatsoever to link amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP) to salmon farming.

Shellfish industry representatives and scientists have unanimously agreed that the ASP risk in Scottish waters is due to natural algal blooms, and have slammed the national press for linking it to fish farm effluent.

Shellfish poisoning during summer months is documented over many centuries, long before fish farming was even thought of. Indeed there is an old adage, still widely adhered to in Scotland, that one should not eat shellfish unless there is an "r" in the month.

ASP was only included in the annual toxic algae monitoring programme in 1996, and has since been detected in very minor amounts in Shetland and both east and west coasts of Scotland. It should be noted that there is no marine fish farming on the east coast.

Yours faithfully,
K.G. McCALLUM,

Stoer, Sutherland.

Rye comment

Sir,

The "spoof" letter sent in by Mr Spike Milligan of Rye showed much promise. The surreal note of his humour might just strike a note with the young people of today.

He might care to develop it and perhaps write material for the light programme on television, when that is invented.

Yours helpfully,
R. VAN WINKLE,

Prestwick, Ayrshire.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

Murray Walker: *Incidentally, the news is that Ferrari have actually stopped development on their new car.*
Martin Brundle: *How do you know that, Murray?*
Murray Walker: *I was there when I said it.*
ITV
(Angus Silvie)

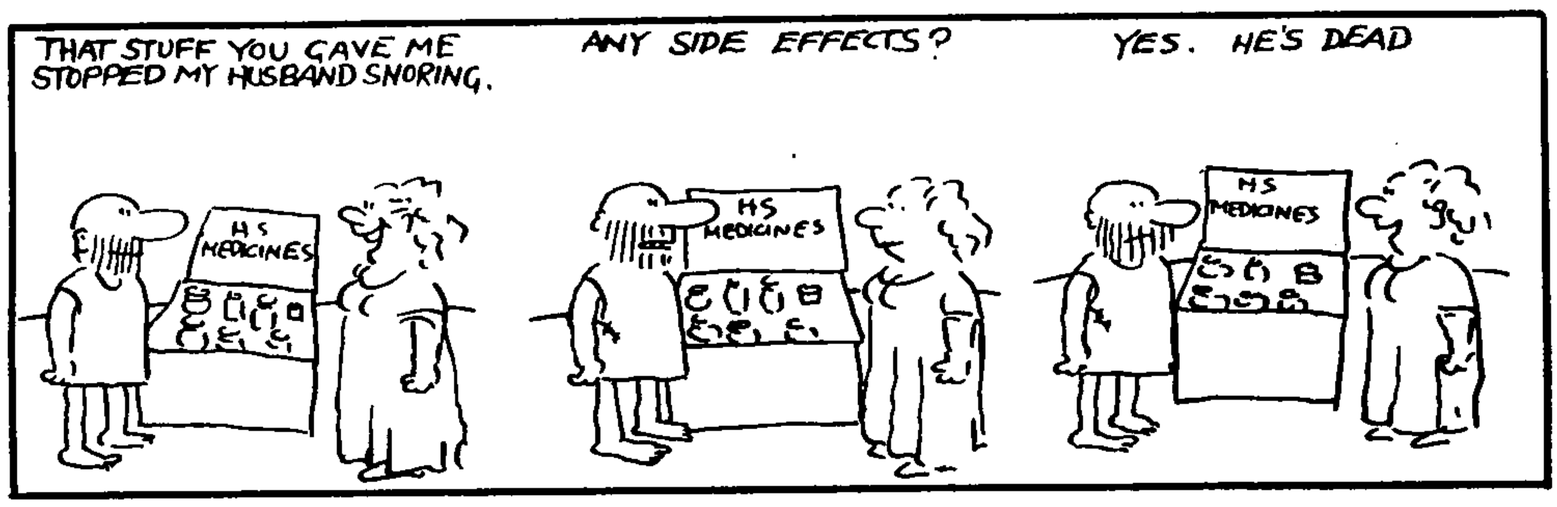
"When Celtic get an opportunity to go above Rangers they've got to jump at it with both hands."
ALAN MULLERY, Sky News
(Bob Hargreaves)

"You half fancied that to go in as it was rising and dipping at the same time."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(Colum McAndrew)

"Nearly one person in four in the Dumfries and Galloway region suffers from some form of mental health."
KIRSTY TOYNBEE, Radio Scotland
(Simon Sholl)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from Khartoum

from Our Own Correspondent

SUDAN, Africa's largest country, now boasts Africa's longest oil pipeline, and our eternally hawkish Islamist government looks forward to funding the world's longest-running civil war with the proceeds.

Who cares if most of the Sudanese people hate the government! True, the Chinese have done most of the donkey work, but we couldn't have got this far without some high-quality British pumps, courtesy of Weir of Glasgow and Allen Engineering, and remain grateful for the encouraging words from your department of trade and industry.

Calling our oil "a tremendous opportunity" in its July 1998 report was a real boost. And thanks too for overlooking the minor problem that the actual oilfields are smack in the middle of a war zone, and part and parcel of the conflict that's tearing the country apart. We've been clearing the area with helicopter gunships and army raids, and replaced inconvenient Nuba and Nuer people with ex-nomad "Arabs" who are at least on our side.

Pity about the hole that was blown in the pipeline a mere three weeks after its inauguration in September. A minor incident, as the project leader Talisman (formerly BP-Canada) insists. A bit embarrassing, though, that it took place near Atbara, 1,000km north of the war-torn south. And after all we've said for the last four years about everything being under control and peace being on the horizon.

Still, we don't want to lose those investors. Happily, we're shedding that "international pariah" image, with France's Total coming back in, Germany's Mannesmann doing a third of the piping, and Sweden's Lundin Oil as explorer and hirer of "security" expertise. And Austria's OMV, whose involvement in that dodgy pipeline in Alaska we don't mention in polite circles. Falsified maintenance records, indeed! Never mind that our pipeline was built on the run, and that we haven't got the proper means to clean up oil spills. Our environment is in the hands of Allah, and we prefer it that way.

Talisman, of course, has a perfectly decent North Sea project and an award-winning on-shore one at Wych Farm in the UK. So we really ought not to guffaw when its boss, the delightfully gung-ho Jim Buckee, vigorously defends our leaders, better known for their "ghost house" torture clinics for would-be democrats and their scorched-earth campaigns in southern Sudan.

Bill Clinton seems to have done us a favour by bombing the Shifa pharmaceutical plant last year, as the blast created instant amnesia about our noble junta's record since it overthrew a pathetic elected government in 1989.

True, the scurrilous locals of Khartoum North, who referred to Shifa as the chemical weapons factory, were probably just being facetious; but there are underground bunkers elsewhere that would have been most unpleasant if hit. From time to time we still drop a barrel or two of something ghastly on villages in the south and the Nuba and Nuer Mountains, but the complaints don't get aired at the UN – everyone's too embarrassed about Shifa, and lining up to get their snouts in the oil trough.

So when, after the explosion, we began arresting more opponents, threatening our neighbours to extradite the culprits, and cursing even our local and sanitised press, no one outside the human rights lobby noticed. The opposition, an awkward coalition, doesn't quite know what to make of its boys' success in blowing up the pipeline. Some of the dead wood at the top – like ageing ex-PM Sadiq al-Mahdi – is uncomfortable. National asset and all that. Mind you, his sister is married to Hassan al-Turabi, the regime's grey and giggling eminence, and he's tired of exile. Others, like the Sudan Alliance Force's Abdel Aziz Khalid, have promised more explosions if the oil companies won't talk to them.

When Turabi boasted in April that the oil money would pay for weapons, Talisman's Buckee said he'd been mistranslated. Clearly the Polish tanks that we sneaked into the country in August were a translation error, too. Watch this space: it gets cold in the Red Sea Hills in winter, and our very viscous oil just might seize up in the pipeline, which might also fracture from thermal stress. Then we'll need more British pumps!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"Young girls of South Africa, listen to my words" cried Joyce Sibanyoni as she addressed a crowd of schoolchildren at the Youth Talk Show in Nelspruit Town Hall. "Your vagina is like a new shoe, and should you allow a person with a big foot to start wearing your shoe, you can imagine what will happen. Within a few years, your shoe will be worn out and shabby, and nobody will want to wear it.

"So my parental advice to all young girls is not to allow any boys to put their besocked feet near your instep. 'Keep your foot out of my shoe, my tongue is pulled out.' That is what you should tell them. Because if you do not, then by the time you get married, your vagina will be loose and ragged, more like an old floppy slipper than a nice new shoe. And no man can stand that." *(Mpumalanga News 24.6.99. Spotter: Paul Millar)*

—●—

"I am pleased to announce that Christchurch City Council is now fully prepared for the Second Coming," declared City Manager Mike Richardson, in a secret paper which he had written for fellow Christians, but which was leaked to the New Zealand press. "I have been having conferences with a very businesslike Lord at numerous top-class hotels, and he tells me that he is 'coming forward' on the plan to move on Christchurch very soon. We are therefore working on our strategy accordingly."

Mr Richardson, a fundamentalist Christian executive, explained that he had been secretly preparing New Zealand's third-largest city for its spiritual destiny for some time. "The recently completed swimming pools were required because of the huge numbers of people who will need to be baptised in a short time, following the Lord's arrival. Extra fizzy drink vending machines will be a priority. The WestpacTrust sport and entertainment centre will be used as a gathering place for the saints, and the recently redeveloped Jade Stadium will enable the Lord to address His chosen ones. The development of Cathedral Square has been pivotal to my planning, and problems with this project have clearly reflected Satan's awareness of the spiritual importance of the project. However, the weight of the Lord's glory has crushed Satan underfoot, just as the traffic in Cathedral Square has crushed the paving stones."

Asked to explain himself at a full council meeting, Mr Richardson said that the paper had not been intended for public release. "Had it been, the method of presentation would have been different. I did not authorise the building of the municipal swimming pools solely with mass baptisms in mind and, had I known that the press would become involved, I would not have specifically mentioned Satan when referring to problems with the development of Cathedral Square."

Councillor David Close later told reporters that "the city council has total confidence in the ability, skills, and competence of Mike Richardson as city manager. The council has always considered Mike's religious views as a strictly personal matter for him." *(The Press [Christchurch], 25.10.99. Spotter: Chris Rennie)*

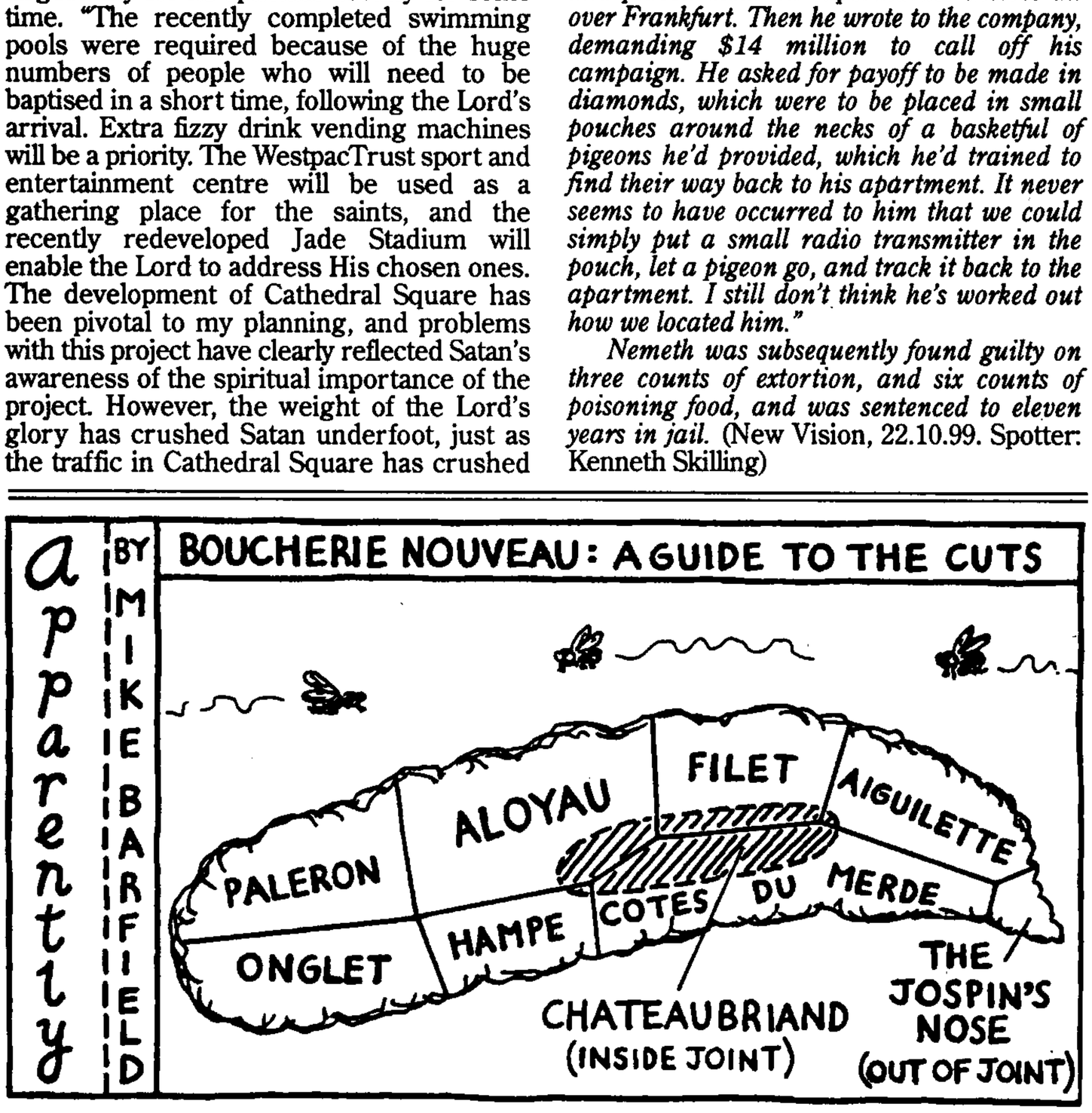
—●—

"The thing about homing pigeons is that they always fly home," said a police spokesman at a news conference in Frankfurt. "That's why they're called homing pigeons. And that's also why we were able to capture Mr Nemeth so easily."

The spokesman was addressing reporters following the arrest of Alexander Nemeth, on charges of attempting to blackmail the Nestlé food company. "Nemeth laced jars of Nestlé

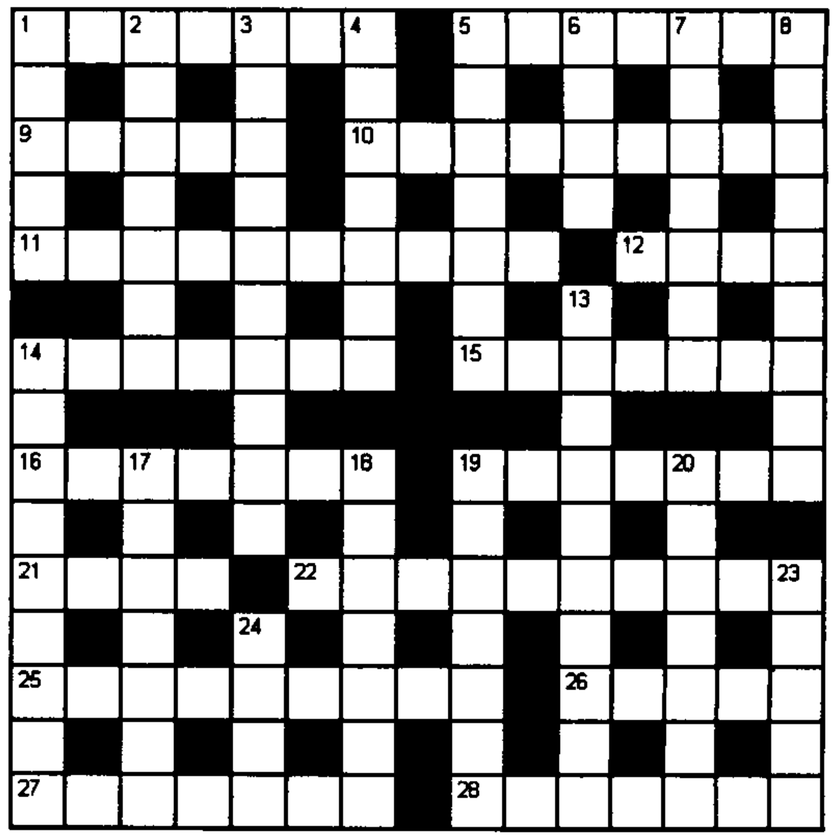
mustard, mayonnaise, and sauce with poison, and placed them on supermarket shelves all over Frankfurt. Then he wrote to the company, demanding $14 million to call off his campaign. He asked for payoff to be made in diamonds, which were to be placed in small pouches around the necks of a basketful of pigeons he'd provided, which he'd trained to find their way back to his apartment. It never seems to have occurred to him that we could simply put a small radio transmitter in the pouch, let a pigeon go, and track it back to the apartment. I still don't think he's worked out how we located him."

Nemeth was subsequently found guilty on three counts of extortion, and six counts of poisoning food, and was sentenced to eleven years in jail. (New Vision, 22.10.99. Spotter: Kenneth Skilling)



EYE CROSSWORD 144

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Maxwell's line to *Mirror* chief: 'go downhill fast' (3-4)
5 To live long don't eat in this capital (7)
9 Mandy's last appearance in broadcasts backing the country (5)
10 Minister is aware, it's said, of how to humbly sniff an opening (5-4)
11/26 Our revolutionary, capital Eye is after many years, to move to the right, possibly (10,5)
12 Tabloid editor abandoned his last erection in the main (4)
14 "Sport my ruin" – Hague's unfortunate lot (4,3)
15 Hunts go around as one means of bagging a fox (7)
16 TV announcer gets to couple with crew (7)
19 Sounds like the car sporting event for the tobacco promoter (7)
21 Place to live round as a working-class type (4)
22 John has to pucker lips revealing what Brenda and co. get out of taxpayers (5,5)
25 Really suffering, being corporately stretched (2,3,4)
26 (see 11)
27 Hall, MP – oily, crooked one (7)
28 Primarily stupid, exaggerated, ranting bollocks associated with Paisley's tongue (7)

DOWN

1 Boobs issuing report about Saudi leader (5)
2 Criminal who makes a household somewhat discontented? (7)
3 Unauthorised release didn't hold water, Mandelson explained initially to his predecessor (6,4)
4 Removes from dormitory bed and exposes (7)
5 Pictures, on a grand scale, having an erection inside pants (4-3)
6 (see 14 dn.)
7 Key party call for what Blair would have his party be? (7)
8 Frogs, some say, require the male and female to be separated in ditch (3,6)
13 Earth electricity supply? Not modern Britain! (5,5)
14/6 Means of getting shot of a distant celebrity? (9,4)
17 Armed Services' policy towards gays: penetration forbidden (2,5)
18 Ulster right with Morrison on getting a perfect state? (7)
19 Retracts promises, making Blair, according to the Eye, all right on two points (7)
20 Netanyahu possibly makes our PM blow his top (7)
23 Jowell enticed another woman inside (5)
24 Pointless s.o.b (4)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 19.11.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 143

Winner: M.J.J. FREEMAN

ACROSS: 1 Skimpy 4 Uprising 10 In The Back 11 Altar 12 Aunts 13 Soft drugs 15 Keep off 16 North 18 Wager 20/25 Crystal balls 23 Debunking 24 Iraqi 25 (see 20 ac.) 27 Orangeman 28 Essayist 29 Crusoe.

DOWN: 1 Sri Lanka 2 Intense 3 Piers Morgan 5 Poke fun 6 IRA 7 In truth 8 Garish 9 Massif 14 Dirty Digger 17 Alliance 18 Wobbles 19 Ruinous 20 Cognac 21 Traumas 22 Edible 26 Spy.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

12 NOVEMBER 1999

Queen Humiliated By Australian Poll

by Our Political Staff Rupert Murdoch

THE British Monarchy was dealt a devastating blow today when millions of ordinary Australians voted to retain the Queen as the country's constitutional Head of State.

Palace insiders admitted that the Queen had been "devastated", "wounded" and "bloody gutted, mate" when the news was broken to her that only the majority of the country wanted her to stay on as Queen.

Sources close to Her Majesty confirmed to the Sunday Times that the Queen had been "close to suicide", but only the thought of Prince Charles becoming King had persuaded her not to take this drastic step.

RESULTS IN FULL

Boomerang North

Yeah mate:	**56%**
No mate:	**24%**
Don't give a XXXX:	**26%**

Castlemaine South

(That's enough results. Ed.)

Britain Next

Leading Republicans, on the other hand, were jubilant. Parties went on all night and old-age pensioners danced in the streets with their young Oriental wives.

OLDEST PEER LEAVES FOR THE LAST TIME

by Our Constitutional Reform Staff **Ex-Lord Snooty**

IT WAS a sad day at the Palace of Westminster when Britain's oldest peer, Lord Dino of Saur, returned to his country seat at Jurassic Park (8 million acres).

Said the departing peer, "My family has served this country for over twenty million years. My ancestors roamed freely here long before Tony Blair and his like had even evolved."

He continued, "We have not had one word of thanks for all we have done to keep this country free from diplodoci."

He concluded, "It would have been courteous for Baroness Jay to have come round for supper to be eaten by myself and Lady Dina Saur."

Lord Dino of Saur is the 147 millionth Baron Swamp.

ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Episode 94

(Boy enters with wounded creature wrapped in newspaper)

Rolf Harris: Now, what's up with this little fellow? He looks as though he's been in the wars. What's his name?

Little Boy *(Lachlan Murdoch, for it is he)*: Rupert.

(Harris attempts to stroke creature)

Rolf Harris: He's a digger, isn't he? A dirty digger by the look of him. It is rare to find one over here. Here, little fellow – ow!! The bastard's bitten me!!

(Harris withdraws hand in shock)

Lachlan: You shouldn't get too close to him. He's very unpredictable when he's in a corner.

Harris: I think he should be put down. It's sad but sometimes it has to be done. It's for the best really. Aaargh!!

(The digger bites him again in the throat. No viewers ring up offering home to digger.)

What You Will Read

An exclusive extract from the sizzling roman-à-clef by William Hague's right-hand PR woman. It's the book that everyone in London is talking about but not buying!

SCANTIES

by Amanda Platell

Chapter One

MIRANDA BLATELL was the gorgeous editor of the *Sexpress on Sunday*, the best-selling, highest circulation newspaper with all the best stories that *(Get on with juicy bits. Ed.)*

Miranda walked into the office of glamorous, young, sexy, Tory leader, William Vague.

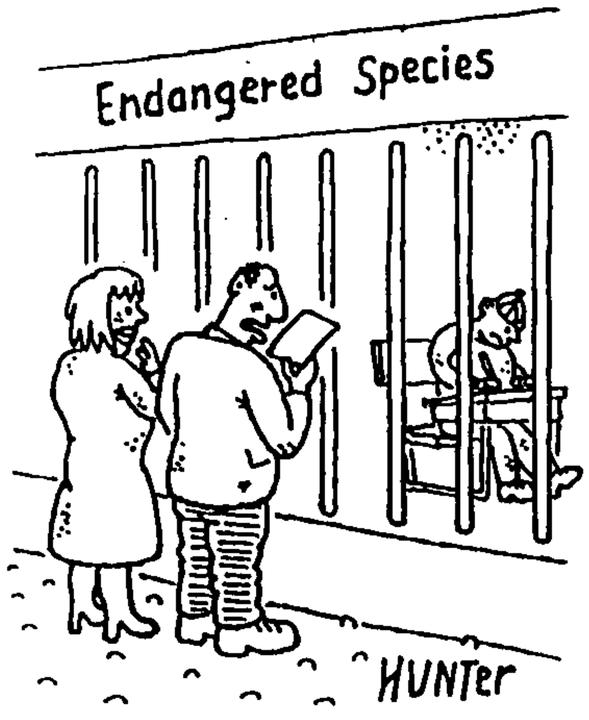
"You said you wanted me," she giggled naughtily, slipping off her coat to reveal her perfectly formed body wearing nothing but La Bollarda silk underwear.

"How can I help you, Mr Vague?" she breathed huskily with the Australian lilt that had bewitched every editor in Fleet Street – except the female ones who were all fat, stupid cows who weren't beautiful like she was. It was pathetic really the way these frumpy old dykes were so consumed with jealousy for anyone who showed the slightest talent, especially if they were good looking as well. And now she had written a brilliant book and had her picture in all the papers *(Get on with the bit where you and Hague have it away on the desk. Ed.)*

"I'm very worried about our stance on the Euro," the baseball-hatted Tory superstud growled.

"Take me! Take me!" I screamed in ecstasy.

The End



"It's a grammar school boy!"

● **1999 Private Eye Annual — on sale now, £7.99**

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Bonjour!

That's the French for "hullo"! And if you're wondering why I am addressing you in this way, it's because I'm getting pretty sick and tired of all this silliness that's been going on in the parish recently!

I was in Tesco's over the weekend and I was shocked to see a notice over the meat counter reading "Buy British And Tell The French To Frog Off!"

And that wasn't the worst of it. As I walked past the fruit counter, a group of elderly ladies were hurling French Golden Delicious apples into the street, shouting "Hands off our Coxes".

And, do you know, I had to say to these ladies: "Ladies, do try and control yourselves. You won't get your way in this world by throwing food around and shouting childish slogans about your neighbours.

"You should remember what Our Lord said. He said we should love our neighbours, not throw their food into the street" *(Gospel According to St Mark and St Spencer).*

And how right I was proved! Only ten days later, after I and my colleague Father Jospin had talked things through in a proper Christian spirit of give and take, a thoroughly sensible agreement was reached which solved the whole problem.

Father Jospin explained how he would love to serve British beef at his church barbecue, but that some of his parishioners had threatened to burn down the church if such a thing was allowed.

I agreed that this was perfectly reasonable, and that as a reciprocal gesture, we would serve French beefburgers at our fireworks party.

So everyone was happy and it was all done without anyone throwing their weight around or getting angry, except of course our friend Mr Brown who made a bit of an idiot of himself by saying that he

The vicar's wife joins in prayers at the Festival of Diwallet as a guest of the Hinduja brothers – the very same brothers who have given so generously to our Millennium Tent

personally would boycott the Communion wine because it came from France.

Mr Brown has now written me a full apology for his very silly and annoying behaviour, in exchange for which I agreed not to mention the matter in the parish newsletter.

So, let that be an end to it, and let's turn our minds to more important matters, like making sure that Mr Dobson is chosen to play the part of Lord Mayor of London in the St Albion's pantomime.

Yours ever,

Tony

A Statement From The Matron Of The St Albion's Old People's Home, Mrs Jay

I am glad to report that our programme of modernising the home for distressed gentlefolk is proceeding very satisfactorily, even though one or two of the former residents have taken their eviction very badly. I am thinking in particular of Mr Burford who jumped up and down on the settee, shouting and screaming, and had to be sedated by the male nurses. But most of the old folk, I am glad to say, have co-operated by filling in the forms explaining why they wanted to stay on. Indeed, some of them have already been allowed back in, so long as they behave themselves and do exactly what they are told by me and the Vicar.

I would like to mention in particular Mr Snowdon, who has done so much good work for unmarried mothers.

Mrs M. Jay

(Well done, Margaret! As the daughter of one of our previous incumbents, you've certainly proved that ability can be inherited! T.B .)

To Remember In Your Prayers

...Mrs Janet Richard, who is suffering distress and depression after the unfortunate dismissal of her husband from the PCC for being no good at his job. Help her to remember that it is not helpful to go around the parish telling a pack of shameless lies about the Vicar and his legal adviser, Mr Lairg. Let her remember how lucky she is that Mr Lairg is a broad-minded and forgiving christian gentleman, who realises that Janet's unfortunate recent outbursts have been no more than a cry for help from a deranged and psychotic woman who needs to spend a long period of rest and silence in a closed order of nuns.
T.B.

Parish Postbag...

Dear Sir,

My attention has been drawn to a number of highly defamatory statements which have recently been disseminated by Mrs Richard. It has in particular been alleged that our client, ie myself, was on many ocasions inebriated and that our client behaved like a school bully, particularly towards Mr Dewar, whose wife he had run off with. I have to say that these allegations constitute one of the greatest and most offensive libels that have ever been perpetrated against a senior and respected friend of the Vicar. We await your reply with interest (5.3 percent).

Lairg and Lairg,
the Lairgover Suite,
Pugin Ho. (formerly the Parish Hall).

P.S. It is also wholly without foundation that our client paid for the lavish refurbishment of his office suite out of monies accruing from the parish poor box. On the contrary, the decision to expand parish funds in this way was taken by the previous incumbent and it was a mere oversight that the order for my wallpaper was signed three days after I came into office.

Notices

■ The St Albion Hunt will definitely meet outside the vicarage on 20 November as planned, although it may not if I am wet. T.B.

■ Videos of the Vicar's recent controversial sermon on "The Forces Of Conservatism" are no longer available. I would be grateful if no one asked for it again. A.C.

■ Mr Robinson will not be showing his photographs in the village hall next week, or indeed at any other time, and if he tries he will be arrested. T.B.

THE NEW ST ALBION PARISH NEWS *Book Two* IS OUT NOW – £4.99

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1999 NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 35p

Beef War Latest

I SEE OUR GALLANT COWS GO IN

By LUNCHTIME O'MOOS

TODAY I saw with my own eyes thousands of British cows storm ashore in France, to recapture the continent for British beef.

After years of waiting, the feeling of excitement was tangible.

At last, our plucky cows were going to show the sewage-eating, garlic-swilling Frogs and Krauts what they were made of (95 percent water, 4 percent growth-promoting hormones, 1 percent BSE).

CJD-Day

As they stormed up the beaches, they were met by a solid wall of highly-trained French and German officials, determined to hurl them back into the sea.

It was a disaster. Wave upon wave of cows, stranded on the beach, hoping against hope for a miracle.

And then, as if a prayer were answered, out of the mist emerged the flotilla of little shits *(Surely 'boats'? Ed.)* led by skipper Nick Brown.

Dunkow

Within seconds, the heroic cows were sailing back to Blighty and the safety of a good old British abattoir.

It was our finest hour.

PROTEST AT 'DISGRACEFUL PORTRAYAL OF JESUS'

by Our Religious Affairs Staff **Phil Pews**

HUGE numbers of gay protestors have been picketing churches over their weekly depiction of Christ as "the son of God who redeemed mankind".

Said spokesman St Peter of Tatchell: "I am sick of seeing one of the world's most revered homosexuals characterised as a preacher, healer and spiritual leader.

"There is no evidence to support this view of Christ. The only historical facts that are known for sure are that Christ was a militant Palestinian gay rights activist who was arrested and martyred for his homosexual beliefs."

He continued: "This perverted version of the truth must be stopped and I am calling for the closure of all these churches, who are only putting on controversial material as a cheap publicity stunt to get themselves an audience."

World of Sport

SURPRISE TRIUMPH FOR FRANCE

By Our Rugby Political Football Staff **Jonah Lomoooo**

IN the most astonishing reversal in the history of the game, the French defeated the English in the semi-finals of the Beef Cup.

The experts had all predicted that the French would be punished by the All-Brown team with its superior tactics and organisation.

Pack of Idiots

But when it came to the crunch, the maverick French team dazzled spectators with a display of Gallic flair. They ran rings round the stodgy English centrists, out-kicking and out-tackling the supposedly invincible English heavyweights, who could not believe what was happening to them .

"They didn't play by the rules," complained the shocked English skipper. "They played a really dirty game and should have been penalised."

But the Italian referee, a Mr Romani Prodi, saw things differently.

The Kowis

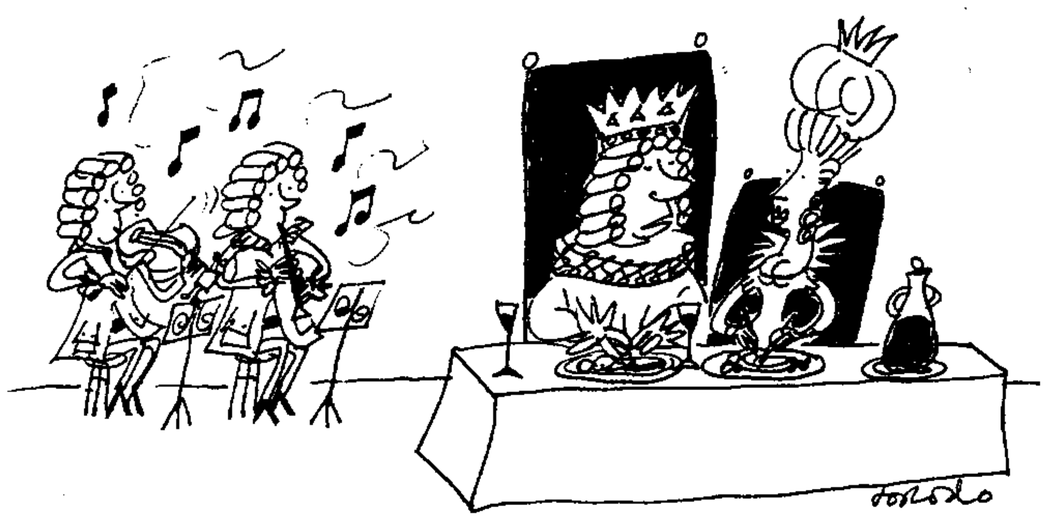
"I was completely fair," he said. "The better side won, as I had decided they would before the game."

Asked to reply to the critics who accused him of bias, he shouted "Vive La France!"

THAT SCORE

France 94
England ("The All Backdowns") 0

"Bloody joy riders!!"



"Yes, it is rather good – a new chap called Wolfgang Muzak, I believe"

ST PAUL TO APPEAR ON PARKY SHOW

by Our Chat Show Staff CLIVE JAMES ANDERSON

THE WORLD'S greatest-ever chat show host Michael Parkinson has pulled off an astonishing coup by persuading St Paul of McTarsus to make his first television appearance since he died 2000 years ago.

WHAT YOU WILL SEE

Parky *(for it is he)*: It is my very great privilege to welcome tonight one of the greatest figures of the last two millennia. A big hand for St Paul!

(Hysterical applause as barefoot man enters eating veggieburger)

Parky *(consults notes)*: How did it all begin, all those thousands of years ago?

St Paul: Well, there was four of us in them days – St John, St George and the other one who does the Thomas the Tank Engine voiceover. But that's not important, Michael. What I want to talk about is what happened to me on this great tour we did of Damascus.

Parky *(reading autocue)*: And what did happen?

St Paul: I saw the light and that, Michael. I was on the road, and I was eating this lamb kebab which one of the roadies had got for me. And then this light came through the window, and I heard this voice calling out "Paul, Paul, why are you eating me?" And it was this sheep. But it wasn't really a sheep. It was more like Linda, sort of dressed up as a sheep. Anyway, from that moment I've eaten nothing but veggieburgers.

Parky: Incredible. That's the most incredible story I've ever heard! Can you tell us some more about that?

St Paul: It is incredible, Michael, but even more incredible is my new album which is dedicated to the vegetableburger-eating community all over the world. And all the other worlds that we live in simultaneously. I mean, have you ever thought, Michael, that we could at this very moment be appearing on millions of other chat shows in billions of other galaxies?

Parky: That's absolutely incredible! Fantastic! Would you like to mime to one of the tracks?

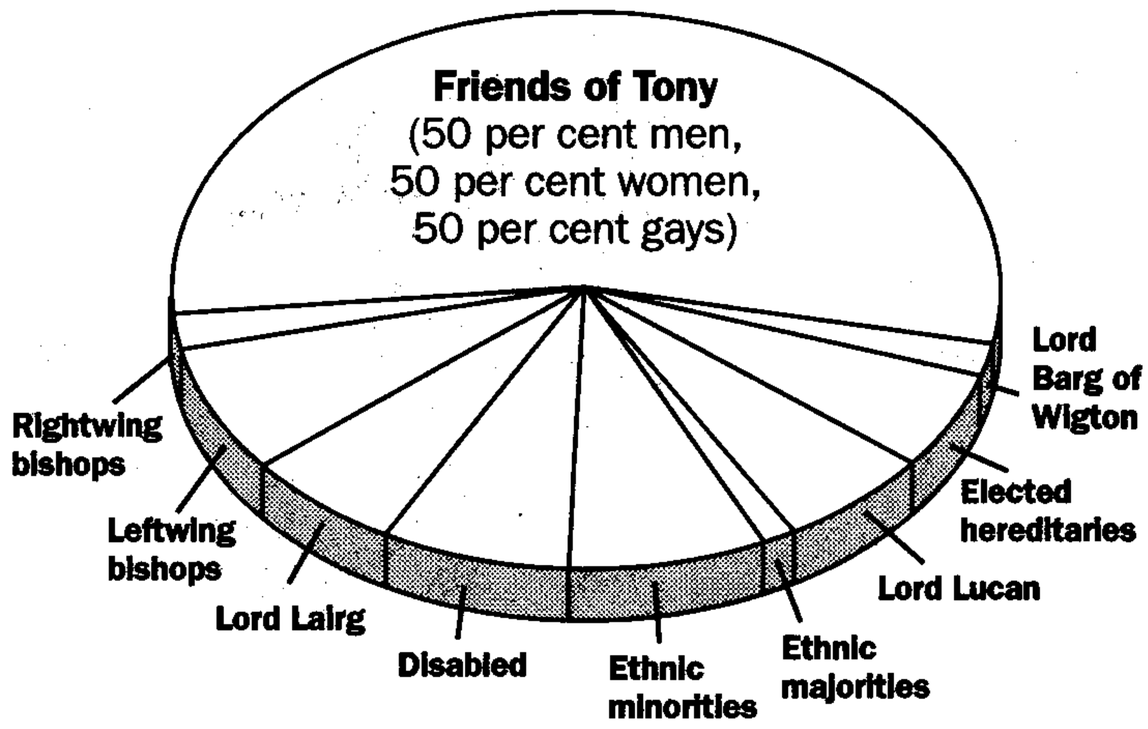
St Paul: I'd love to, Michael, that's why I agreed to come on.

(Group plays 'Band's Got The Runs [They've Eaten Too Many Veggieburgers]')

A video of this historic interview is now available for only £25.99 from BBC Enterprises.

EXCLUSIVE

That new-look House of Lords – What you will see



What You Will Switch Off

BBC1

7.30.Changing Rooms

Sparks fly when Greg moves into John's Broadcasting House and gives it a complete makeover. Out goes John's controlled minimalist style and in comes Greg's bright, breezy, chirpy look. John immediately bursts into tears, complaining "I hate it. It's all vulgar and crass and populist."

Greg is offended, "The new-look BBC is one hell of an improvement on John's dreary world of red-tape."

Will their friendship survive? Will the two men ever speak to each other again?

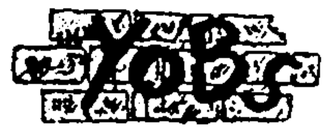
UK Gold

8pm Drop The Dead DG

Hilarious comedy set in the world of television. Trouble starts when new boss Greg arrives at his new office only to find his predecessor John is refusing to go. Greg's friends in high places (Tony) offer John a peerage to persuade him to quit. But John merely locks himself in a cupboard and continues to issue incomprehensible memos to the staff through the door. Greg is furious, especially when he finds he hasn't got a desk. Will he throw John out of the window?

Cast In Full

John Birt . . . . . .JOHN BIRD
Sir Christopher Bland . . . . .JOHN FORTUNE
Greg Dyke . . . . . .ALAN YENTOB
Alan Yentob . . . . . .ROLAND RAT



HUSBAND

Meanwhile, victims of the Southall crash are furious at what they see as the Government's attempt to put off the debate over the best national train breaking system until next year. *Observer*

The University of Salford Students' Union operates a policy of equality and condones discrimination of any type. *Student Direct*

We are looking for an individual who has a proven track record of working with and managing voluntary sector and grant-aid activities within a multi-racist diverse community. *Tower Hamlets advertisement (Grauniad)*

That Chancellor's Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS TREVOREM McDONALDENSIS, VULGARE BARBADOS APPELLATUM, CELEBRATISSIMUS LECTOR "NOVELLA AD DECEM", BONGUS, BONGUM, BONGO, QUONDAM CUM JULIA SOMERVELLAE AUT SANDIO GALLIO SED SUBSEQUENTER SOLUS MAGNIFICUS ANCHORUS HOMINE QUI DIXIT "ET FINALITER". EXEMPLO GRATIA "QUO BUDGERIGARIUS HORATIUS SCOOPIT MAGNAM FORTUNAM IN LOTTERARIO"; ATQUE FAMOSUS PONTIFICATOR POETICUS QUI INTRODUXIT "SI" AB RUDYARDO KIPLINGO AD LECTORES TELEGRAPHICI QUOTIDIANENSIS. HONORATUS EST AB REGINA ELIZABETHA GLORIANA, CREATUS EQUES; ET FINALITER TRANSFERRATUS AD NOVEM PROGRAMMUM "HAEC NOCTE CUM TREVORE BARBADO" FLOPPUS MAXIMUS, NULLO PUNTO, ET SINE SPECTATORIBUS, BOMBUS, BOMBUS, BOMBUS. NUNC INSTALLATUS QUAM CHANCELLORIUS HONORARIS UNIVERSITATIS SOUTH-BANKENSIS (QUONDAM POLYTECHNICUS NEASDENSIS).

GINGER IN LOVE WITH GINGER

by Our Celebrity Staff **Phil Spice**

CHRIS EVANS has told friends that he has fallen deeply and hopelessly in love with the ginger-haired star of TFI Friday.

Their whirlwind romance began when Evans spotted himself in the mirror across a crowded room.

"It was love at first sight," said Chris. "I was instantly attracted to Ginger. He's so talented and good-looking," he continued, "not to mention modest."

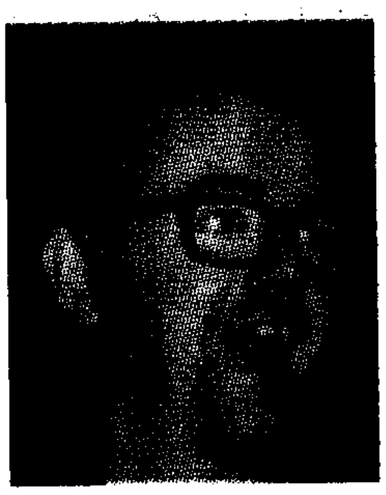
The relationship blossomed when Evans appeared with himself on his hit Channel 4 show "Thank God It's Nearly Over".

There was an instant and visible rapport with Chris flirting outrageously with himself for the whole programme.

Evans has admitted to colleagues that he wants to spend the rest of his life with the brilliant Virgin Radio boss.

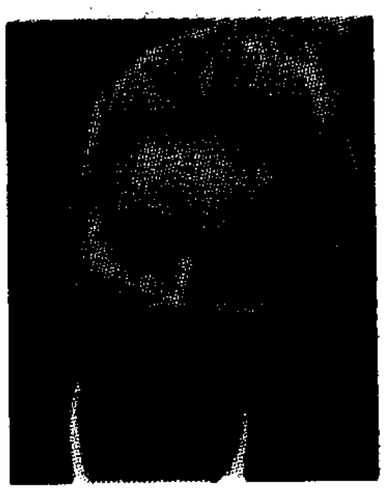
"This time it's for good," he said. "No one could love me more than I do."

© Matthew Fraud PR



Chris Evans

Wedding Of The Century

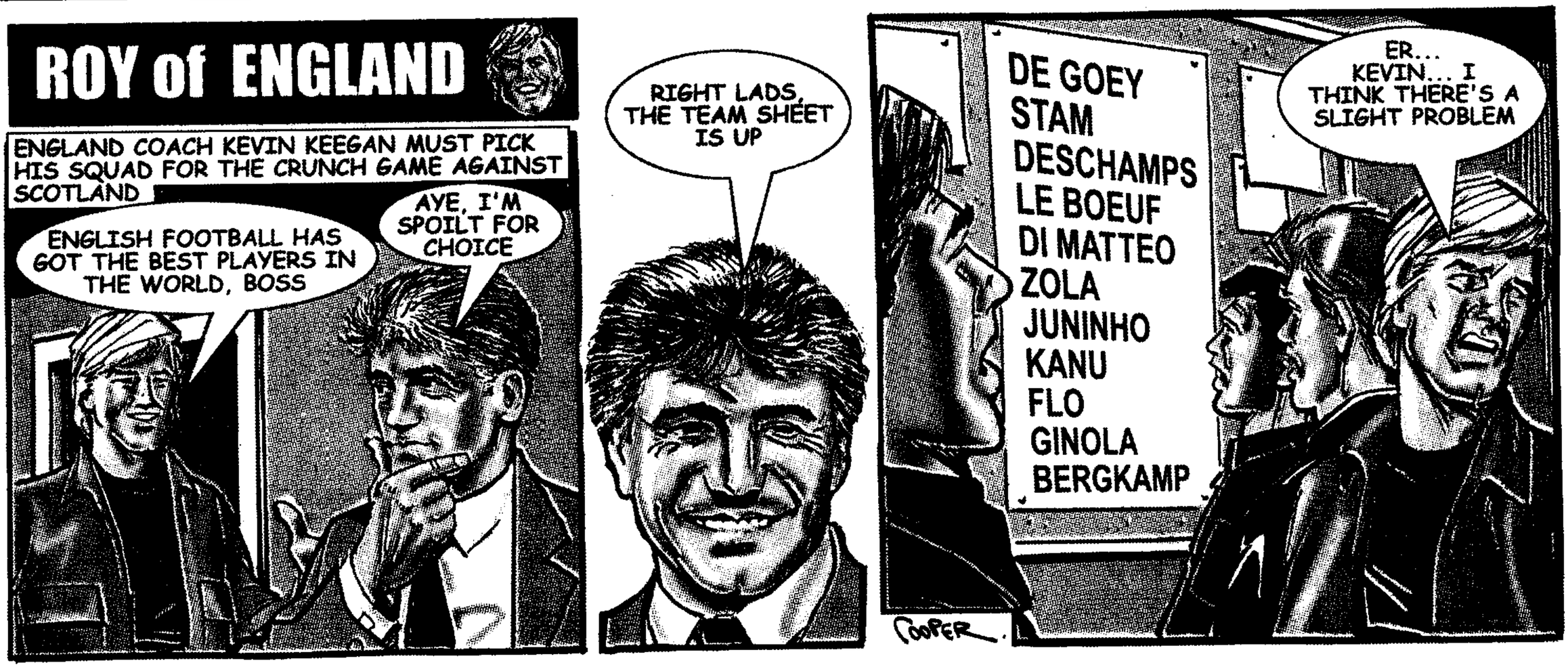


Geri Halliwell

How They Are Related

Dame Edith Evans
|
Dame Harold Evans
|
Sir Christopher Bland
|
Christopher Robin
|
Robin 'Ginger' Cook
|
Richard 'Ginger' Branson
|
Christopher Biggins

Vincent Halliwell
|
Ginger Rodgers
|
Rodgers & Halliwell
|
Rodgers & Hammerstein
|
Geri and the Spicemakers
|
Geri Hallomagazine
|
Jerry Hall



AMAZING LEGAL BREAKTHROUGH

Two Men Will Father New Baby For First Time

by Our Science Staff **M. Brio**

HISTORY was made today when, for the first time, two men were both named as leaders of a newly-reborn political party.

The two men, named as Michael and William, have enjoyed "a stable relationship" for more than ten minutes.

They told waiting newsmen that they were "over the moon" at being allowed to play the joint role of father to the tiny party.

The surrogate mother is believed to be an elderly London woman, a "Mrs T.", who said she was "very happy" for the two young men.

"They are both very caring people," she said, "and I am very pleased to hand over to them the party to which I gave birth in the 1980s."

ON OTHER PAGES

Can the baby survive?
by Dr Thomas Utterfraud 7

COURT CIRCULAR

BUCKINGHAM PALACE
Her Majesty the Queen will attend a Millennium Lunch to salute Britain's rich and famous. She will pay tribute to them for their achievements in appearing on television, making lots of money and going to lots of celebrity lunches in order to be saluted.

HIGHGROVE
His Royal Highness Prince William will be making an appearance on the front pages of the nation's press seated on a horse wearing a silly hat. He will be attended by the Royal Fox Pursuivant, who will provide entertainment for the Prince by running across fields very fast before meeting an untimely death.

THE PROCESSION

First Fox
Mr Reynard

First Hound
Sniffer

Second Hound
Snorter

Third Hound
Tom Parker-Bowles
(Surely "Snuffler"? Ed.)

First Horse
Camilla Parker-Bowles
(Surely "Charlie's Fancy"? Ed.)

First Horseman
His Royal Highness Prince Charming

First Newshound
Mr Sid Filth of the *Daily Moron*

Second Newshound
Mr Len Snaps of the *News of the Screws*

Third Newshound
Mr John Witherow, Editor of the *Sunday Times*

(That's enough. Ed.)

QUEEN HONOURS CHARLES

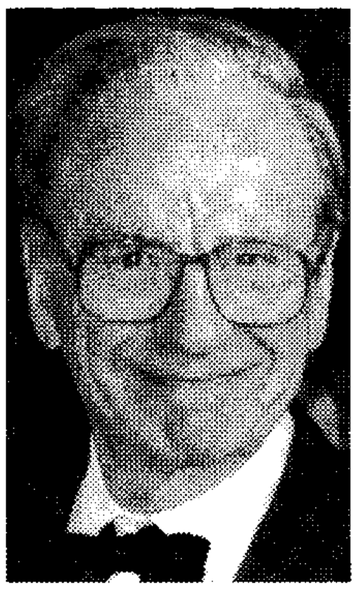
HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

MARKS & SPENCER
EVERYTHING MUST GO!
SNAP!
A CUSTOMER! EVERYBODY LOOK EVERYBODY IT'S A REAL LIVE CUSTOMER!!
SWOON!
I'D LIKE TO EXCHANGE THIS FOR ANYTHING FROM GAP
WE'RE NOT ASKING £30... WE'RE NOT ASKING £25...
WINTER LATEST DESIGNS SACKCLOTH AND ASHES
HAPPY XMAS
YES, WE NOW TAKE CREDIT CARDS OR PART EXCHANGE ...OR BEADS..
BUY ONE AND I PROMISE TO PUT IT IN A BAG WITHOUT OUR LOGO
PROFITS
EXIT
I'M SORRY, MISS, IT'S MY JOB TO KEEP YOU IN!
MAYBE THERE AREN'T ENOUGH DECENT MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE ANY MORE
HAVE FAITH MY CHILD
PRADA
FREE COUNSELLING
I DON'T BELIEVE IN ST. MICHAEL ANY MORE!
!! @!!!
RATTY WIFE, AND KIDS TO SUPPORT!
THE LOOK DEPRESSED
MANAGER
I USED TO GET ALL MY UNDERWEAR THERE, BUT NOT ANY MORE
DON'T GO! I'M SURE WE CAN FIND YOU SOMETHING!
HARVEY NICHOLS
OH, NO! I NEVER SHOPLIFT IN THERE ANY MORE
HEATH

THE TIMES

Editor Peter Stothard must be "hard up" to run this feature. Will it "Peter out" soon?

Centre of attention
No. 94 The Times

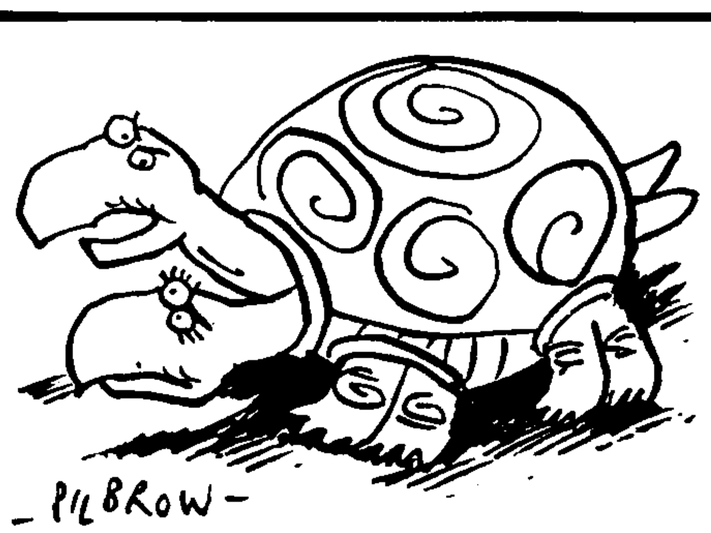


It must be "Murdoch" trying to run the Times, if this is the best new idea you can come up with.

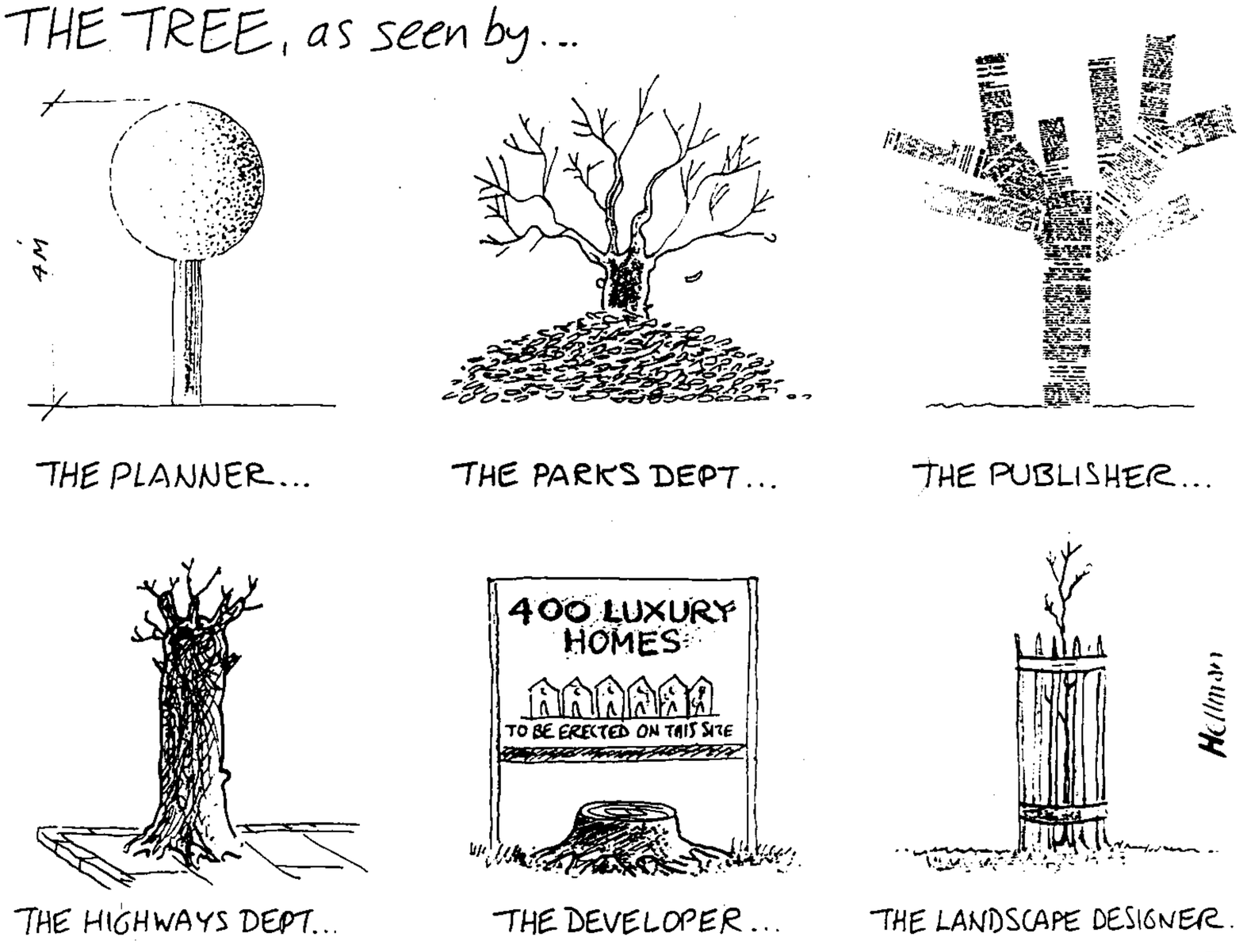
Dust to dust and Ashcroft to Ashcroft. Get out the "sack" cloth, Mr Stothard, because they say you're going to be fired.

THE TIMES
35p
Remember, remember...
Sophie Dahl settles in New York
Crème for all top secretarial appointments
New safety tests for British meat
Brown gives in to France on beef ban
Portillo roars back on to political centre stage

Will there be hard "Times" ahead for poor old Stothard when he is sacked after losing a certain libel action? Or should we say Stot "hard" Times ahead? *(That's enough. You're fired – Ed. No, it isn't. **You're** fired – R.M.)*



"Let's face it – moving in together was a big mistake"



LORD GNOME JOINS ROYAL PARTY FOR NATION'S TOP ACHIEVERS

by Our Social Affairs Staff **P.R. Handout**

PRIVATE EYE proprietor Lord Gnome was among those invited by the Lord Mayor of London to a "Worst of British" banquet for the 300 people who have done most to discredit Britain in the eyes of the world during the last millennium.

"It is like Madame Tussaud's come to life," gasped one onlooker, as celebrities ranging from Sir John Birt to Sir David Frost mingled with such political giants as Lord Archer and Sir Leon Brittan.

AMAZING

The world of crime was represented by train robber Lord Biggs and former Guinness boss Sir Ernest Saunders.

The world of letters was represented by former Sun editor Sir Kelvin McKenzie and Julie Burchill.

Stars from the world of music and the arts included Mr Christopher Evans, Mr Liam Gallagher, Sir Jonathan Miller, Lord Lloyd-Webber and Miss Geraldine Halliwell OBE.

High society figures, such as Mr Nigel Dempster and Greek-born columnist Mr Takalotofcokeupthenos, rubbed shoulders with giants from the world of sport, such as Mr Bert Grobelaar, Sir Lester Piggott and Mr George Best.

"This is worse than the Chamber of Horrors come to life," said another onlooker, as the guests trooped into the Mansion House for a lavish 10-course luncheon.

That "Worst of British" Luncheon Menu in full, and complete guest list p. 94

ON OTHER PAGES

Paul Johnson on "Why Oh Why Wasn't I Invited?"

RICH TEENAGER GOES FOX HUNTING SHOCK

by **Our Entire Staff**

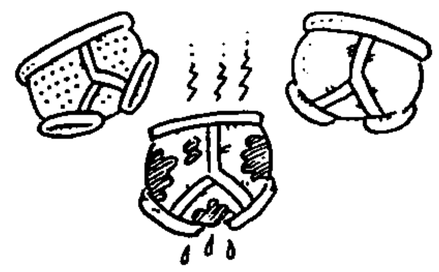
BRITAIN reeled as a 17-year-old public school-educated member of the upper classes went fox hunting yesterday.

"We never expected anything like this to happen," said everyone.

● More stunned reactions pages 2-17.
● 217 Die In Air Crash p. 87

Advertisement

New Stock Just In At M&S



Our exclusive new range of Chief Executive's underpants – available in Off Brown, Very Brown and Ohhhh! My God Have You Seen Our Share Price!

DIARY

PETRONELLA WYATT
ON WOODROW WYATT

Father blows his *Nez*

Father was a firm believer in the necessity of blowing one's *nez*, especially if and when one was afflicted by a cold. But, as with so much else, Father's behaviour with his *mouchoir* could never be condemned to the ranks of the merely ordinary.

Father did not keep his *mouchoir* in his top pocket, like lesser mortals. Instead, like mighty Apollo, he maintained it up his left armpit. Furthermore, whenever he put his hand under his erstwhile shirt to reach for it he sang the first verse of the *Marseillaise*.

I once had the temerity to question him as to this erstwhile action. His reply was typically Father. "A gent" he opined, "always keeps his handkerchief up his armpit."

Father delighted in blowing his *nez* upon the most auspicious occasions. He gave it a vociferous blow during the quietest moment in a Chopin recital by Sir Alfred Brendel. He triumphantly blew it during a blessing in Westminster Abbey by the erstwhile Archbishop of Canterbury. Such priceless – if deliciously unpredictable! – behaviour established Father as one of the great British eccentrics of this benighted yet peripatetic and frequently erstwhile century. Only the peevish and the envious would seek to deny the charm that lay tucked within Father's *mouchoir*.

Father was a slow eater

Father was not a fast eater, nor was he a medium-paced eater. In fact, I would describe Father as a slow eater. Father ate slowly, not fast. When eating, he liked to take his time. "I am a slow eater," he once confided in me with relish. A born raconteur, he relished the chance to tell the tale of what an exceptionally slow eater he was. He once even ate slowly in the same restaurant as President Roosevelt. "I am a great believer in eating slowly!" Father would conclude, amidst gales of laughter. In retrospect, I would certainly describe Father as a slow eater.

Father teaches Gandhi a lesson in manners

India is a large hot country to the South, full of rather too many uninteresting people. Its history, if it can be said to have earned that appellation, has been checkered. Father spent some time in that continent in his youth. "Who's the skinny little fellow in the nappy?" asked Father while he was overseeing that troublesome land on his monarch's behalf. It was explained that the man in question was the erstwhile Gandhi. But it was ever Father's habit to take down a peg or *deux* those who were in possession of an inflated view of themselves. Father thus approached Gandhi with an air of sublime indifference. "Look here, Mandy," he said, "You've forgotten your suit and tie. Run off home like a good little chap." In this way were dispelled all Gandhi's illusions of grandeur. Many years later, when it came to choosing the new Chairman of the Tote, it was Father to whom the job was offered, and not Gandhi, for all his airs and graces. *Touché*! In the presence of the great, the upstart must surely wither.

Father feeds The Queen Mother

Who amongst us doth feign recoil from the need of divine people to worship? I do not recollect exactly when Father first made the acquaintance of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, but he was most enamoured of her bounty.

When I was aged but eleven, the Queen *Mère* arrived for *déjeuner* at our *maison*. She sparkled with natural *vivacitée*. Her eyes shone like emeralds, but with none of their mineralised remoteness. Unlike emeralds, too, you could not remove them from their sockets without causing permanent damage, nor could you place them on your finger. In many ways, the Queen Mother's eyes were less like emeralds than like the sea, as blue as the Mediterranean on a sunny morn, but with none of the litter floating in them – used *condoms*, old cans and so forth – the product of continental indifference to hygiene and personal cleanliness. Her Majesty's eyes twinkled like lightbulbs, but even as a child I realised that they would not smash if you dropped them on the floor.

Father was duly smitten. He was anxious to do right by his monarch, and the greatest preparation went into choosing the food. For the first course, Father decided to serve the Queen Mother "Money Wrapped in Filo Pastry", which he knew to be a firm favourite of royalty. I watched as the blessed lady peeled off the pastry, her eyes shining like a seal after it has just slipped out of the water and its skin is still quite shiny, and he rejoiced as She slipped the brand new £20 notes into her *décolletage* for safe keeping. "Dearest Woodrow," she purred approvingly, "You have done me proud. Now – do tell me," she added, turning to the erstwhile company, "What do we all think of those beastly blacks in Africa? Nothing a good scrub wouldn't improve, eh? Mmmm! Oooh! More money! Delicious! Too kind!"

Father wins the Second World War

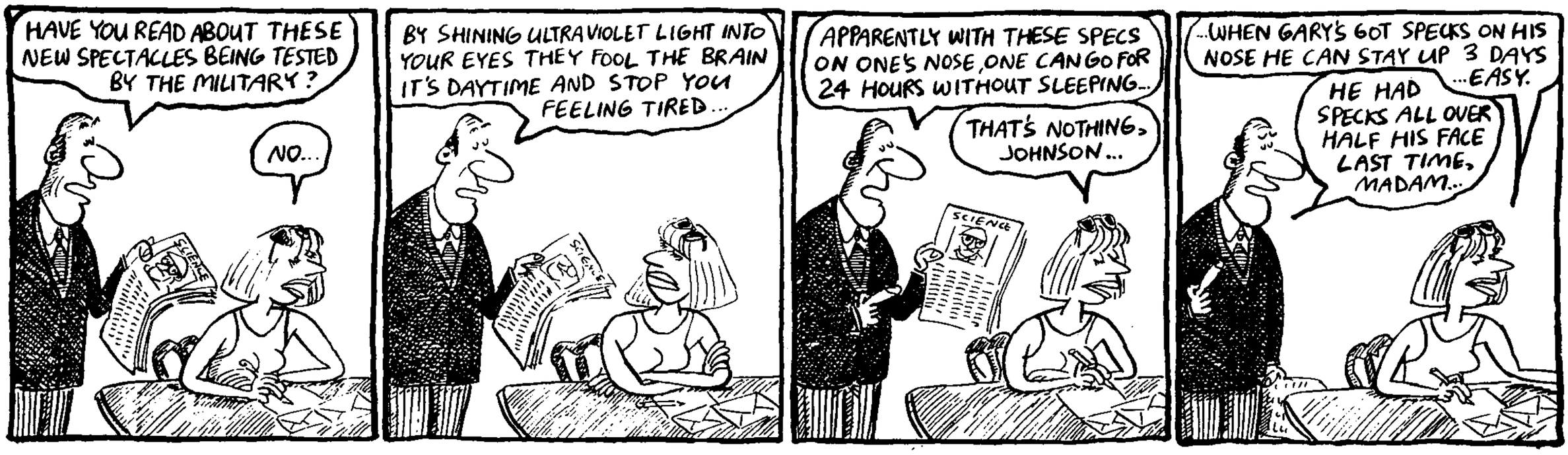
Adolf Hitler was the German *Fuhrer* who caused so much trouble in World War II. Father could not tolerate him. He delighted in relating how Adolf Hitler provoked him into taking our country into warhood. As Prime Minister during this erstwhile period, Father made many a memorable speech – often with a glass of brandy in one hand and a cigar in the other! – in order to rally the troops. "We shall fight them on the beaches", "Never in the field of human conflict" – these were just some of the *phrases de catch* that Father employed in those wartime broadcasts.

But human life is, as Jean-Jacques Montaigne de la Rochefoucauld, the sixteenth century sage, so rightly observed, a cabaret on a bowl of cherries on a bed of roses. Victory does not always come to the winner. Later, Winston Churchill, a junior politician, stole much of Father's thunder for winning the Second World War. Father was not bitter, however. "Winston was reasonably competent," he used to say, with characteristic *generositée*. "He certainly lent me a hand."

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


HAVE YOU READ ABOUT THESE NEW SPECTACLES BEING TESTED BY THE MILITARY?
NO...
SCIENCE
BY SHINING ULTRAVIOLET LIGHT INTO YOUR EYES THEY FOOL THE BRAIN IT'S DAYTIME AND STOP YOU FEELING TIRED...
APPARENTLY WITH THESE SPECS ON ONE'S NOSE, ONE CAN GO FOR 24 HOURS WITHOUT SLEEPING...
THAT'S NOTHING, JOHNSON...
...WHEN GARY'S GOT SPECKS ON HIS NOSE HE CAN STAY UP 3 DAYS ...EASY.
HE HAD SPECKS ALL OVER HALF HIS FACE LAST TIME, MADAM...

● **CRAIG BROWN'S OMNIBUS of Private Eye Diaries is now available in hardback, £11.99**

Literary Review

Blank it coverage

QUESTION: how do novels get reviewed? Well, here is an affecting tale from the world of books.

Six months ago a writer from the north of England whom for the purposes of this homily we shall call *x* published his first novel with the highly respectable firm of Victor Gollancz. Six weeks later, both author and editor were aghast to *discover that the* book — a highly promising debut — had been noticed by exactly one newspaper.

Over a consolatory luncheon at some West End watering hole, *x* popped the inevitable question: "What do you have to do to get reviewed?" he asked. Looking up from his *vichyssoise*, *x*'s companion happened to spot the literary editor of, let's call it the *Excess on Sunday*. "Why not find out?" he replied, mentioning the book's title to this lady. "I don't remember that one," came the riposte. "What was on the jacket?"

So there you are. By and large the novels that you see reviewed in the posh prints are by people literary editors have heard of. There are some honourable exceptions — the *Independent* and the *Guardian* do their best, despite space constraints and editorial pressure, as did the *Mail on Sunday*'s review section until they sacked the late lamented Paula Johnson. Basically, though, the rule is this: if Julian, or Anita, or Martin writes a new one in it goes, no matter how bad the content. As for the rest, the promising debutants, the angry young men veering tetchily into middle age, a squint at the publisher's colophon will generally swing the verdict. Oh, and of course, any *journalist* who writes a novel (Zoe! A.A.!) automatically gets maximum coverage, because, well, we're all in this together aren't we mates?

Twenty years ago this stance might just have been defensible. Publishers' lists were bigger then. The mid-list (shorthand for modest-selling "literary" fiction) hadn't yet been axed. The prejudice against age hadn't set in (Michael Frayn's Booker-shortlisted *Headlong* was rejected by at least one London major on the grounds that its 66-year-old author was "too old"). Broadly speaking, the books produced by the mainstream firms were the books worth reviewing. That, however, was then. Two decades on, with many a "name" novelist chucked out on the street and the mid-list almost extinct, much of the most interesting stuff currently being published doesn't hail from messrs Cape, Secker or Faber, but from outfits that you and I, and – more important – most literary editors have never heard of.

Turning to the discarded oldster pile, it would be hard to think of two more distinguished hoary-headed veterans than William Cooper (b. 1910) or Philip Callow (b. 1924). And yet, curiously enough, authorship of such ground-breaking post-war classics as the former's *Scenes From Provincial Life* (1950) and the latter's *Common People* (1958) cuts no ice at all in these cash-conscious days.

Consequently both their new ones — Cooper's *Scenes From Death and Life* (Smaller Sky, £7.99) and Callow's *Black Rainbow* (Shoestring Press, £6.99) — are being brought out independently. Both are highly recommended and much more interesting than much of the tat on last weekend's books pages. The same goes for many a modest literary novelist dumped by the majors when the accountants took over. Despite being set in Wales — generally a kiss of death for any work of art — Patricia Barrie's *Songs of Silence* (Honno, £6.95), for example, is a neatly written, humorous and dramatic novel by, yes, a writer who used to be published by Chatto and Hamish Hamilton.

As for upcoming talent, Bandula Chandraratna's excellent *Mirage* — published by himself — even impressed the Booker judges, one of whom, Boyd Tonkin, performed the charitable act of reviewing it in the *Independent*. Faber are now said to be interested, but why wait for Mr Chandraratna to be taken up by the opportunists at Queen's Square. *Mirage* can be ordered from Serendip Publishing, 24 Hern Road, Oundle, Northamptonshire, PE8 4BS, at a cost of £6.75, including post and packaging. Or there's the short story collection *Hard Shoulder* (Tindal Street Press, £6.99), a showcase for the work of the Birmingham-based Tindal Street writers' group — issued last month and so far reviewed (sniffily, inevitably) in one national newspaper, the good old *Weekend Telegraph*.

You get the idea? All over the place, a host of small presses and independent imprints are at work shepherding the work of superannuated veterans and promising newcomers into print. Some of it is very good. Scarcely any of it, owing to the combination of prejudice, idleness and vested interest, gets reviewed. But I mean, *darling*, what *was* on the jacket?

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, PT 94

The Falling Angels: An Irish Romance

John Walsh

(HarperCollins, £16.99)

IT was just another Wednesday night in Dulwich. A bottle of Chardonnay. The company of my all-too fragrant publicist, Maximiliana. "Tell me," I began, smoothing the lapels of my Nicole Farhi jacket, "is there a *Mr* Maximiliana...?" But the hard glint in her eye told me to stop. "This is serious, John," she breathed. "It's time you wrote another book. It's ten years since the last one. You owe it to your public."

It was true. But what about? Then, beyond the window, I watched an Irish labourer vomiting the contents of a pint glass of Guinness into the gutter. That was it! *Jaysus fock* I thought. *I'm Irish. Isn't County Galway my ancestral home? And aren't I the long-lost son of Brian Boru?* I rushed home to tell my partner the news.

"And isn't it you yourself and all," I remarked as I opened the door.

"What?"

"Indeed to God I've discovered my heritage," I told her. "And how are the spalpeens?"

"John. You were born in Battersea. For Christ's sake, you're not Brendan Behan."

But it was no good. I found a Dubliners record in the attic. A week later, armed with a lavish advance, I found myself walking up the auld village street that I'd read about in the *Independent* travel section. There was a rustling in the hedge and a formidable looking Penguin-suited figure jumped forth.

"Top of the morning to you," I exclaimed.

"Hell," said the figure, whom I immediately recognised as Sister Chastity from the Order of Dancing nuns of St Ignatius. "I was just saying a novena for me pig." She inspected me closely. "And isn't that you John Walsh, fecking gobshite that y'are, that stayed in England, talked posh and broke his mammy's heart?"

"The very same, Sister," I proudly agreed, knowing that for once Norman Mailer was wrong. You *can* go home.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE morning after the Booker, both the *Grauniad* and the *Indescribablyboring* printed a picture of a chair, empty but for a copy of JM Coetzee's victorious book.

"*Disgrace*, the winning novel by JM Coetzee, takes the author's place at last night's ceremony," ran the *Graun*'s caption, while the *Indie* plumped for: "Coetzee's empty chair last night; he was in Chicago".

In reality both papers were perpetrating their own disgrace: the pictured seat had been nowhere near the Guildhall. The shot had been taken on the morning of the ceremony during a photocall for all of the shortlisted authors at Hatchards in Piccadilly, with the shop's name being quite clearly emblazoned on the backdrop.

■ HAVING jumped on the free internet service provision bandwagon through a half-baked sponsorship link with search engine company Yahoo in March, Waterstone's is now considering jumping off again and pulling out of the deal after just eight months.

The idea of the service was to drive custom towards the company's own website, but the expected rush has not occurred and the free CDs of browser software sit gathering dust in branches all over the UK.

On the face of it withdrawal seems sensible; but such online alliances don't come cheap: according to a recent Goldman Sachs report, a comparable link-up between BOL.com and Freeserve cost the former between £6m and £8m. Consequently, Waterstone's already unpopular David "Mekon" Kneale faces raising the hackles of his overworked shopfloor staff even further by writing off a few million pounds on a misguided gamble at a time when he has declared that there is no money for recruitment.

'Bookworm'

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S AMAZING! WHY'S HE SO POPULAR?
JOHN MAJOR BOOK SIGNING
BECAUSE HE GOT RID OF THE TORIES!
JOHN MAJOR BOOK SIGNING
MY HERO!

IN THE BACK

SERIOUS CRIMES

The Brown stuff

HARK to John Brown, the former head of the long-disbanded West Midlands serious crimes squad, who was in full voice in the Birmingham Evening Mail on 1 November, protesting that allegations of torture made against him in the court of appeal were "entirely false".

Mr Brown explained: "Our names have been dragged through the mud but we were honest and professional officers... We never used torture to extract a confession... We were never called into court and asked to put our side of the story." The impression left on *Mail* readers must have been that brave, decent and respectable police officers had been traduced in court proceedings from which they had for some reason been barred.

Mr Brown was responding to the appeal court's stern judgment in the case of Keith Twitchell, which had been heard earlier in the week. Ever since he was convicted of manslaughter and robbery in 1982, Mr Twitchell complained that the most substantial evidence against him – a signed confession – had been obtained after he had been tortured in Willenhall police station in November 1980. Plastic bags, he said, had been placed over his head until, in fear for his life, he agreed to sign whatever was put in front of him.

Among his torturers Twitchell named John Perkins, who later became famous for his part in the framing of the four men wrongly convicted of murdering the newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater, and Brown, then an inspector. When Twitchell, writhing in agony and gasping for breath, finally agreed to sign a confession to something he did not do, Perkins exclaimed: "These bags are great – they don't leave any marks!"

These allegations against the officers were not accepted by Mr Justice Jupp, the trial judge, or the jury which in 1982 convicted Twitchell on a majority verdict. Keith Twitchell spent 12 years in prison; and his vigorous and consistent complaints about the torture were investigated by a special, high-powered and as usual secret internal police inquiry in 1984 under the late Detective Chief Superintendent Rimmer of Lancashire police.

Rimmer's report, 143 pages long with 260 pages of supporting documents, concluded: "This investigation has not produced any evidence to support Twitchell's allegations of improper conduct by the police at the time of his arrest, detention and subsequent interrogation." That was obviously the end of the matter – until the case of Derek Treadaway exploded on the home office consciousness.

Treadaway alleged that he had been arrested in 1982 by a number of West Midlands serious crimes squad and convicted of a series of 1979 robberies on the strength of a confession which he had signed – after being suffocated by a plastic bag put over his head in Bromford Lane police station. To complete the coincidence, one of the senior officers involved in the alleged torture was the newly-promoted Superintendent John Brown.

Treadaway sued three police officers, including Mr Brown and the West Midlands chief constable for assault. The case was heard in Birmingham crown court in July 1994 by Mr Justice McKinnon. Mr Brown attended court and gave detailed and substantial evidence. This is Mr Justice McKinnon's summary of his view of Brown's evidence:

"There is no doubt that Mr Brown was a most unsatisfactory witness. At times, prolonged in some instances, he seemed incapable of answering simple questions straightforwardly. His stock in trade does seem to be ambiguity – a leaving of his options open so that, later, any gaps can be plugged without his having appeared to have committed himself to any particular position earlier. His track record confirmed that earlier conclusion. I have no doubt that he simply did not tell me the truth, in a number of respects."

Mr Justice McKinnon entirely rejected Brown's account and those of his two colleagues. He found Mr Treadaway had indeed been assaulted in the way he alleged, and that his confessions were achieved as a result. He awarded Treadaway £50,000 damages. The Treadaway case was duly referred to the court of appeal, and heard by Lord Justice Rose and two other judges in 1996.

Once again there was no question of barring Mr Brown from the proceedings. On the contrary, the court issued a summons to Mr Brown and a colleague to attend. Mr Brown and his colleague did not appear and were ordered to supply affidavits to explain what looked like their blatant contempt of court. The affidavits were not handed on to Treadaway's defence and to this day no one apart from Lord Justice Rose knows what excuses were offered by the policemen for not complying with so majestic a court order.

Even the home office was impressed by the coincidence between the torture which Derek Treadaway said was inflicted on him in 1982, and the precisely similar torture which Keith Twitchell, who had never heard of Treadaway let alone conversed with him, had claimed was inflicted on him by the same officers two years earlier. The home office reopened the case, but did nothing about it for three years.

Fortunately for Mr Twitchell, the criminal cases review commission, almost as soon as it heard of the case, sent it back to the appeal court where Lord Justice Rose and his colleagues, after a few acerbic remarks about the West Midlands serious crimes squad, quashed the conviction.

Keith Twitchell had spent 12 years in prison for something he did not do, and the officers involved in his conviction had conspired to torture him and then invent an alibi for themselves. Ordinary people who handcuff and suffocate their fellow human beings and then lie, cheat and invent alibis to duck the blame normally have to face the full force of the criminal law. Some 30 acquittals have now been recorded of West Midlands people against whom evidence has been concocted by lying serious crimes squad policemen, yet not a single police officer from the disgraced force has been prosecuted.

IMMIGRATION APPEALS

Irvine burlesque

THE great Lord Irvine of Lairg is at the centre of yet another heated behind-the-scenes row, this time involving the curious conduct of a member of the immigration appeals tribunal.

As lord chancellor he has been under pressure to take action over the behaviour of Mrs Rosie Mannion, a solicitor who sits as a legal member of the tribunal, and over several years has managed to drive almost all her colleagues to distraction.

What irks the other tribunal members is the way Mrs Mannion seems to wish its hearings to be run to suit her convenience. For her £70,000 a year retainer (plus £150 a day hearing fee), she is meant to hear several cases a week. But her colleagues complain that it is she who decides which days of the week she wishes to work (rarely more than one) and at what time the hearing should begin (usually 10am, rather than the customary 10.30).

They say she is unusually choosy as to whom she is prepared to sit with. They comment on her habit of keeping everyone waiting while she dissects the briefing papers in minute detail, then constantly intervening in the proceedings so that participants cannot put their case properly. They finally observe how, when she disagrees with her colleagues, which is far from infrequently, she is not slow to express extreme displeasure when they have difficulty understanding the point she is trying to make.

The odd thing is that these complaints about her idiosyncratic approach to the tribunal's arrangements have been continuing through most of the seven years she has been a member. A succession of tribunal presidents have recommended that she be removed from the list, but each time they have been overruled. The chief reason, it appears, is that when her behaviour was first questioned, Mrs Mannion made clear what no one had previously guessed: that she is in origin half-Pakistani; that her full name was Mrs Amin-Mannion, and therefore any criticism of her conduct could only be motivated by racial prejudice.

So determined was she that such outrageous bias should not be allowed to force her from office, her colleagues became accustomed to late-night telephone calls, which she takes the precaution of recording. But they eventually became so weary they sent a dossier to Lord Irvine imploring him to take action.

He invited Sir Brian Kerr, a Northern Ireland high court judge, to carry out a private inquiry to decide if it would be appropriate to hold a full inquiry. However, tribunal members were so struck by the pussyfooting nature of Sir Brian's investigation that they inevitably wondered whether his brief was simply to ensure he did not come up with anything to justify any further action.

So perfunctory were his interviews with Mrs Mannion's colleagues that he scarcely had time to introduce himself before concluding the conversation. This has so enraged senior tribunal members that they have now appealed to Lord Irvine to end the charade of Sir Brian's inquiry and do what he should have done all along: remove Mrs Mannion from her £70,000 a year post without delay.

The only response from the great man has been to indicate, with his customary charm, that he is not prepared to do anything of the sort. Is it not odd how, when someone with a reputation as a "bully" (cf the diaries of Lady Richard *passim*) is asked to act firmly in a just cause, his strength seems to desert him?

INSOLVENCY

Bass notes

THE cobwebs still need to be swept from the dark corners of the insolvency industry – particularly in the case of the 1988 liquidation of Manchester-based packing company JS Bass by Barclays bank and Ernst & Young.

Barry Chapman, the former managing director of JS Bass, has spent the past 11 years gathering evidence to support his belief that the accountants acted fraudulently (*see Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

Commissioned by Barclays, Ernst & Young completed a review of Mr Chapman's firm in just 48 hours, during which brief period they appear to have made crucial errors – overestimating annual losses by a factor of five, and alleging that two debts amounting to £72,000 were outstanding when in fact they had been settled 10 days previously.

As a result of the receivership 130 people lost their jobs, including Mr Chapman who was forced on to income support, while Ernst & Young earned £950,000 as the company's liquidator.

Last month Austin Mitchell MP, a long time supporter of Mr Chapman, wrote to trade minister Kim Howells requesting an inquiry – something the affected parties have been calling for since the start.

To date, the only body to have looked into the matter is the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), which, according to Mr Mitchell, did little more than "scratch the surface" in a series of "partial and inadequate investigations".

This is not the first time Mr Mitchell has called on the DTI to reopen the matter, but in his latest letter he points to the mysterious fact that even after an extensive search the court service has been unable to trace any record of the administration order which Ernst & Young would have been required to obtain under the insolvency act of 1986.

MENTAL HEALTH

Broadmoor means worse

"I'M sorry I have to do this. I can't carry on the rest of my life like this." So wrote Lisa Smith shortly before she took her trainer laces, fashioned them into a noose and hanged herself from a lavatory window at Broadmoor high-security hospital. She was 23 and escaping from what had been a wretched life.

Sexually abused as a very young child by a family "friend", she first ran away from home when she was seven. In local authority care, Lisa was passed – like so many others – between foster parents and children's homes, never receiving the consistent care, love and help a damaged child like her needed.

By 18 she was on the streets, finding oblivion in drugs and funding her habit through prostitution. In 1995 she started fires – at a mental health day centre in a church and a shop. Convicted of arson, she was sent to Holloway prison where she first tried to kill herself. From there she went to Broadmoor where, three years later in a toilet cubicle, she finally succeeded.

Lisa Smith's suicide could and should have been avoided. Her death and that of fellow Broadmoor patient Alex Higgins, 41, came after a report by the Mental Health Act Commission had raised concerns about the sudden rise in the number of suicides at the secure hospital. When Lisa Smith hanged herself last August, patients (seven in all) were killing themselves at a rate of one every 36 days.

The report questioned whether acute staff shortages were impairing Broadmoor's "ability to assess and manage suicide risk". There were concerns that patients' social, recreational and therapeutic activities were being cancelled and cut-back. The report said: "This included very limited access to fresh air and effective withdrawal of direct nursing observations at night on some wards. Commissioners have expressed serious concerns at the limitations imposed upon patients..."

The commissioners were also critical of potential safety risks of "locking-off" at night some parts of the wards. They raised all these concerns directly with both Broadmoor and the NHS executive. Neither were these the first public warnings.

At the inquest last February of Victor Nash, 56 – he hanged himself from a radiator with his dressing gown after 29 years in Broadmoor – a letter was read out from a patient warning of more tragedies. He described how patient care was being cut back adding to their distress, while tight resources were concentrated on security. There were in fact to be four more tragedies – Susan Goscombe, 26, Jason Short, 31, Alex Higgins and Lisa Smith.

On the night Lisa died there was only one qualified nurse on duty on her ward – the hospital's own code suggests there should be two. Further, one of the nursing assistants had already been on duty for 12 hours when Lisa's body was found at 7pm. The nurse wasn't due to go off duty for another two-and-a-half hours. There was no emergency resuscitation equipment on the ward. Earlier that day Lisa had been involved in an altercation with another patient, leaving her "angry and tearful". She started "cutting-up" – self-harming by slashing at her arms. It emerged at her inquest that she had been the victim of bullying on the ward.

Her consultant psychiatrist Dr Fiona Mason told the inquest that Lisa had a "great need for therapy". But it seems there was little: her treatment consisted mostly of anti-depressant and anti-psychotic drugs.

One insider told the *Eye* this was not unusual: "Security is paramount and everything else has been cut back. Therapy and treatment for some patients amounts to no more than watching television all day and having a visit every month or so from a social worker."

Inquiry after inquiry over the last 20 years have all condemned the country's three high security hospitals – Broadmoor, Rampton and Ashworth – and called for their closure in favour of smaller, more manageable units. But "new" Labour, like old Tories, has ignored them. In July, shortly before the deaths of Lisa Smith and Alex Higgins, then health secretary Frank Dobson insisted the problem wasn't the bricks and mortar of the hospitals, but what was going on inside. (Ashworth had just been condemned after the discovery of a paedophile network in the hospital). The ease with which a total of seven people at Broadmoor can hang themselves from bars, lavatories and windows would suggest otherwise – especially when there are too few staff to monitor them.

A spokesman for Broadmoor said that as well as individual internal inquiries into the deaths, the hospital had also set up two independent inquiries. The first is by Professor Louis Appleby, director of the national confidential inquiry into suicides and homicides by people with mental illness. He will look at policy and practice and assess any impact of staff shortages on suicide risk. The second inquiry, by Helen Halley, director of nursing at the State Hospital, Carstairs, will review nursing practice in relation to suicide prevention and staff levels.

In the meantime the hospital has secured an extra £3.1m in funding and had embarked on a worldwide hunt for extra nurses. It expected to increase its staffing levels by about 100 nurses and nursing assistants. "It is an unfortunate fact that suicides among psychiatric patients – even in the best-run organisations – occur in clusters. When it happens, it is vital that we learn as much as possible to avoid future risk," said the spokesman.

No restraint?

MEANWHILE at the Norvic Clinic in Norwich, a medium secure unit for the mentally ill and disordered, concerns have arisen about staff using control and restraint techniques that can kill patients.

David Bennett, known to friends and family as Rocky, died at the clinic after an incident involving several staff. A year later, his family still does not know exactly how or why he died; police are still investigating and no date has been set for an inquest.

Rocky's sister Dr Joanna Bennett – a senior lecturer in mental health – is concerned by the delay because inquest witnesses' memories may fade, and other lives may be at risk until the lessons of Rocky's death can be aired in public.

As an expert in mental health care, Dr Bennett was already concerned that black patients, like her brother, get a raw deal from psychiatric services, there being an over-diagnosis of severe mental illness, over-use of seclusion and detention and over-use of medication. Tragically, black men, often those with mental illness, are also "over-represented" among those who die in custody after the use of control and restraint.

Infamous cases like those of Roger Sylvester, Shiji Lapite and Alton Manning have meant that new guidelines governing the use of control and restraint, techniques and training have been issued by the home office to the police and to the prison service. Somehow the health services whose staff also employ such methods have been overlooked.

Neither the department of health nor the Mental Health Act Commissioners keep a central register of deaths or monitor the use of control and restraint methods. Dr Bennett has learned of one other recent similar death of a mentally ill woman in her 40s. But as she said: "No data is available. It shows how little value is given to the lives of these people – and their deaths."

FOCUS ON UKIP

Independence daze...

AT LEAST three firms of solicitors are now being employed by warring factions in the UK Independence Party – Messrs Jeffrey Green Russell, Messrs Bates Wells and Braithwaite, and of course our old friend Peter Carter-Fuck.

Carter-Fuck first entered the fray in June, when he persuaded the *Times* to print a tiny clarification about an encounter between UKIP's chairman, Nigel Farage MEP, and a prominent member of the British National Party. Carter-Fuck's bill for this brief negotiation was a wallet-boggling £18,000.

As we noted in the last *Eye*, half of this was paid by the *Times* and another quarter by UKIP – even though the party's national executive committee (NEC) hadn't been consulted about Farage's resort to law. But what has happened to the rest of the bill?

The mystery is now solved. "The party treasurer has received a final invoice from Messrs Carter-Fuck, solicitors, in the sum of £4,035.98," the agenda for the latest NEC meeting reveals. "This is in addition to the £4,000 settled by the party in June 1999... The NEC requires an explanation of this legal action, and in particular why the party should have incurred this level of irrecoverable costs."

Presumably the NEC will have to run up yet more legal bills in its quest for an answer, since party leader Michael Holmes MEP is now communicating with his own executive only through lawyers. On 20 October, Bates Wells and Braithwaite wrote on his behalf to nine members of the executive, warning that if they didn't resign forthwith Holmes would take the dispute to the high court. Three of them have retaliated by suing Holmes for slander; and Holmes in turn is pursuing a libel action against a supporter of the Referendum Party, Philip Slater, who described UKIP as "lions led by donkeys".

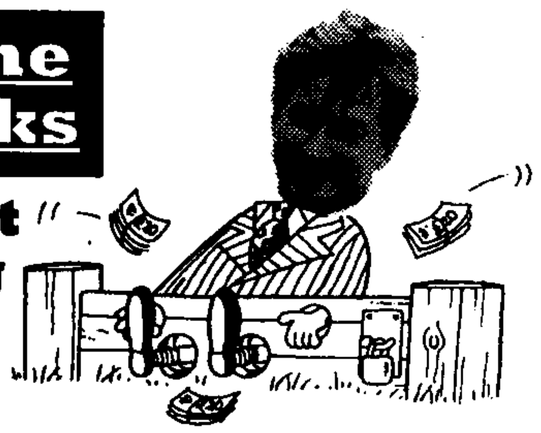
Meanwhile, Holmes's supporters are doing their best to disprove the charge that they are fruitcakes. One UKIP member, Ian Sadler, has just written a thoughtful tome called *Babylon the Great: The Church of Rome and the European Union*, which reveals that the EU is a sinister plot masterminded by the Vatican as part of its centuries-old conspiracy to destroy British democracy. The Spanish Armada was financed by the Roman Catholics; Guy Fawkes was a Catholic; so is Cherie Blair. QED.

Oh, and the UKIP candidate at the Kensington and Chelsea by-election, Damian Hockney, is campaigning on the slogan "It takes a real man to defeat the EU" – presumably a reference to Portillo's past proclivities. This seems a bit rich coming from the publisher of such sissy magazines as *Hair & Beauty*, who recently confessed to wanting a "buttock implant" to make his bum look sexier in jeans. Thanks to his fondness for extensive cosmetic surgery – nips, tucks, liposuction, nose-jobs etc – Hockney has very few "real" bits left.

PS: Even high court judges are beginning to raise an eyebrow at Peter Carter-Fuck's fees. Last month Mr Justice Morland said he was "staggered" to learn that Carter-Fuck's firm had bunged in a bill of £19,758 for a half-day interlocutory hearing during a libel suit between Victor Kiam and the *Mirror*. The *Mirror*'s solicitors, Olswang, had charged a mere £7,000 for the same hearing, at which they asked the court to strike out Kiam's claim that the paper had published a "malicious falsehood".

Even though the judge ruled against the *Mirror* on this issue, he agreed that Kiam should pay the newspaper's costs. Carter-Fuck's fees, he declared, were "grossly extravagant".

In The Stocks



Robert Ayling
Chairman of British Airways

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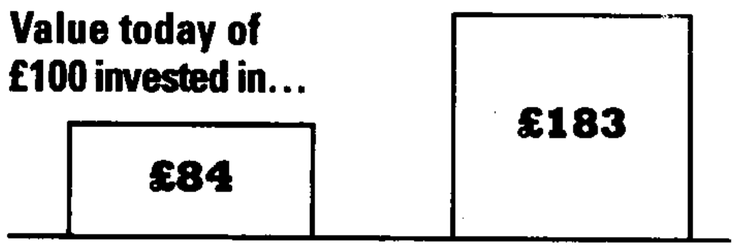


In the City

AS THE great heavyweight champion Joe Louis drily remarked, when quizzed about a particularly slippery opponent: "He can run but he can't hide". The same is true of that master of slip and slide Jeffrey Archer, as he seeks to evade the pursuing ghost of Anglia Television share deals past.

Just when Lord Archer thought he had escaped a share deal that strongly suggested insider trading, the great story teller decided to run for mayor of London and once again has had to start running from questions about Anglia.

When he says nothing Archer only serves to justify his critics. When he does speak he makes matters worse. Producing yet another version of the events of January 1994 enabled trade secretary Stephen Byers — eager to damage Archer's chances in the mayoral race — to contemplate the reopening for an unprecedented fourth time of the investigation by inspectors from his Department of Timidity & Inaction.

This opportunity was perhaps increased by Archer using new solicitors, Eversheds, rather than Mishcon de Reya who acted for him in 1994, as his mouthpiece to rebut the *Economist* revelation that he had promised not to deal in Anglia shares. Doubtless Archer is not adopting the policy of his friend the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed, who switches to new lawyers rather than explain embarrassing contradictions to the previous ones.

Analysis of Archer's often mutually exclusive public attempts to explain his twin purchases of Anglia shares ahead of the bid from MAI creates the inevitable conclusion that Archer is either unable or unwilling to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. A syndrome he has evidenced when dealing with other curious episodes in his life. How otherwise to explain his inability to give one explanation and stick to it?

But then certain key unanswered questions about his Anglia share deals defy an innocent explanation. Which is why the DTI inspectors in their unpublished original report concluded there was overwhelming circumstantial evidence of insider trading.

Luckily for the man who would be mayor there was no direct evidence to prove that Archer had inside information about the pending bid from MAI when he bought the shares. Without that crucial element any prosecution was certain to fail. Archer denied he knew and his wife Mary — an Anglia director — denied telling him.

The questions that clearly exercised the inspectors were:

1. Why did Archer not use his usual stockbrokers Cazenove instead of Charles Stanley, a small firm where he knew some partners but was not a client, to buy shares in Anglia the day after the TV company's board were told of the MAI bid?

Was it because Cazenove might have balked at dealing in shares of a company where Archer's wife was a director and a bid was widely mooted? Might the City blue bloods have been unenthusiastic about then booking the two bargains into the name of Archer's associate Broosk Saib about whom they knew nothing?

2. Why did Archer instruct that the two lots of 25,000 Anglia shares — cost £242,000 — be bought on the Thursday and Friday for the new stock market trading account that began the following Monday rather than for the current trading account ending that Friday?

Buying for "new time" meant paying a premium. A normal investor, even one hoping to see the widely tipped takeover bid (Archer says he was following such tips) would have been happy to buy in the old account. But not an investor who knew the MAI bid was in, was to be considered by the Anglia directors the following Sunday and might be announced on Monday morning before the stock market opened and the new account began. Many brokers — including probably Cazenove — did not like doing "new time" business because it always suggested the client and/or the deal may be "hot". Charles Stanley did the business because they trusted Archer and knew he was good for the £240,000, whereas they could have had no such confidence about the unknown Saib. But if the shares had been bought for the current trading account, then Saib would have had to produce the £240,000 plus VAT and commission before he made any money.

3. Why did Archer not immediately tell the broker at Charles Stanley, whom he knew, that he was buying the shares on Saib's behalf?

Archer only revealed this crucial and unusual information when told the first 25,000 shares had been bought. Why did he not simply tell Saib to contact the brokers using his name? But that could have taken time and time — as the "new time" instruction indicates — was of the essence. Did perhaps the great story teller suddenly remember that he had written to his wife in August 1992 declaring: "I have no Anglia shares and have no intention of buying any in the future"? This was after being made aware of the Stock Exchange rules preventing relatives of directors dealing at sensitive times. Lady Archer had relayed this message to the Anglia board. Anglia had reminded its directors of their duties and those of their families in 1993. Directors were told relatives had to disclose any share deals to avoid problems. Does this explain the "grave error" for which Archer apologised to his wife five years ago?

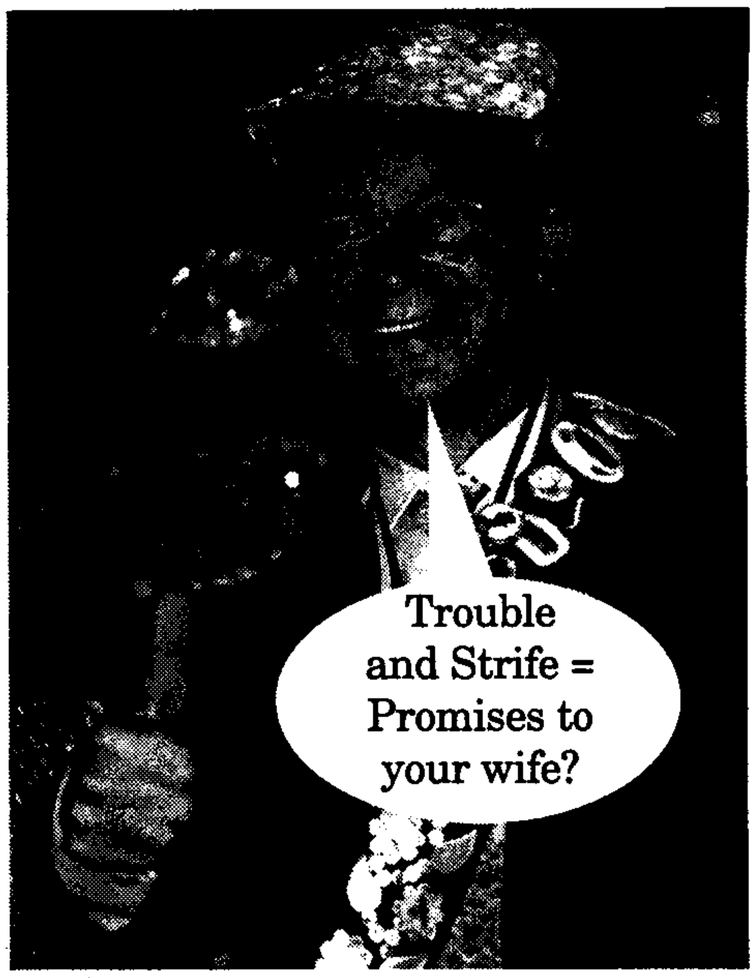
4. Why did Saib — a man who claimed to have "bought a lot of shares" — not use his own stockbroker?

Could it have been because the broker might not have been persuaded that Saib had £240,000 to gamble? Was Saib aware that Archer was committing him to paying this amount to Charles Stanley? Was perhaps Saib — who had a City friend close to the deal — the man with the tip but not the cash?

5. Did Saib give Archer instructions to sell the Anglia shares held in his name within hours of the MAI bid being announced on the Tuesday?

If not, why did Archer sell? If so, why did Saib — if he knew the shares had been bought in his name — not contact Charles Stanley directly?

LORD ARCHER RHYMING SLANG



6. Why did Archer immediately sell the shares bought only days before if not to allow Saib to collect the £77,000 profit without having to ever pay the £240,000? Why was the cheque sent to Saib at Archer's London home rather than to his own address?

It was the sale that alarmed Charles Stanley because they saw the implication of the buying for "new time" not to mention the Archer/Anglia link. The reasons those who have or think they have inside information dealt for "new time" was to gamble on making their profit and selling out before they had to pay for the shares and before their names appeared on the company share register. When it worked it was all profit at no cost leaving no trace.

Archer and Saib no doubt were asked and answered these questions for the DTI inspectors. What these answers were is not public knowledge — although watch this space as the vote for mayor nears and Labour desperation increases.

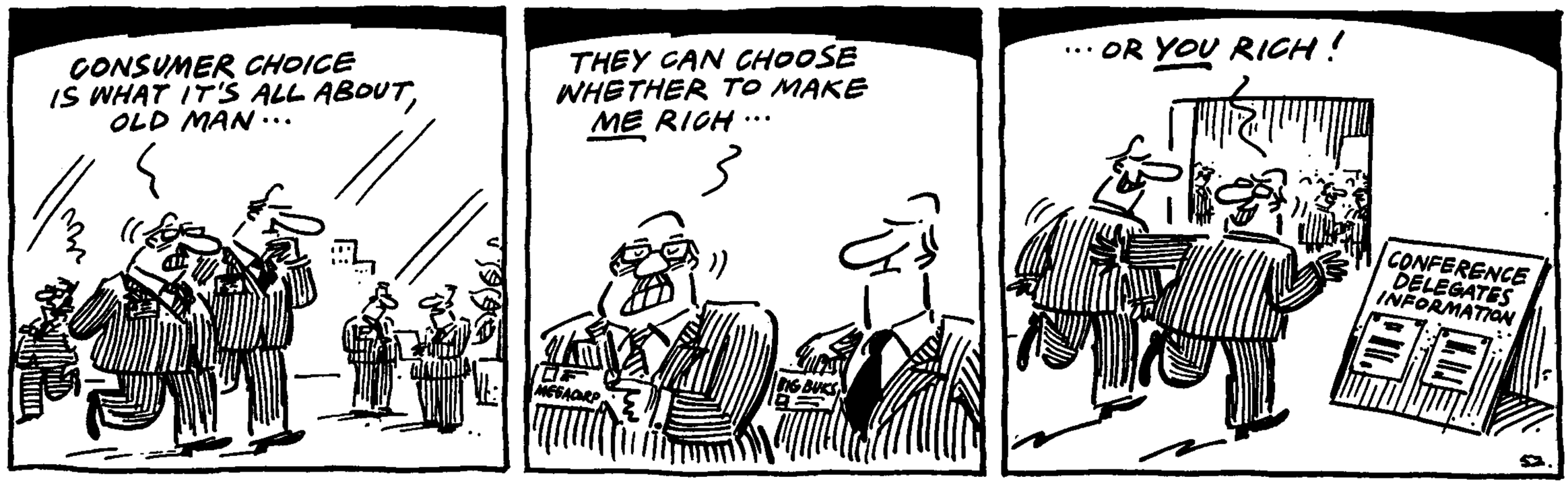
Just what the present government knows about the contents of the Archer reports is less than clear. Last year then trade secretary Margaret Beckett denied the two previous reports had been seen by Labour ministers.

But in disclosing his decision to ask DTI officials to advise whether Archer's latest version of Anglia events required a fresh investigation, Stephen Byers appeared to indicate that he knew a little more. The latest public explanation "cast doubts on the reasons Jeffrey Archer gave five years ago as to why he purchased the Anglia TV shares", said Byers. Does that mean Byers knows what answers Archer did give the DTI inspectors? Certainly those with knowledge of their reports say the great story teller has not stuck to his story.

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG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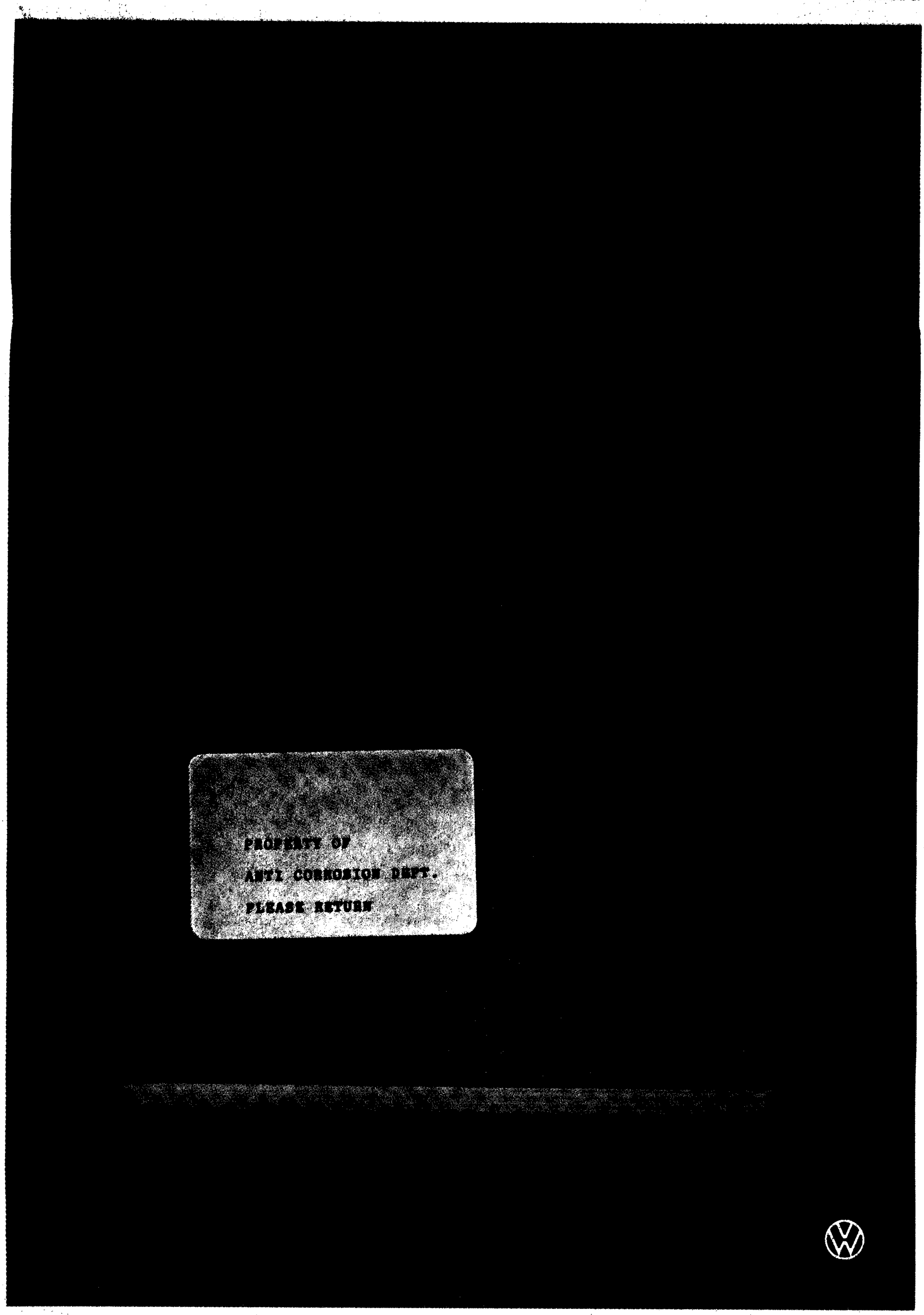
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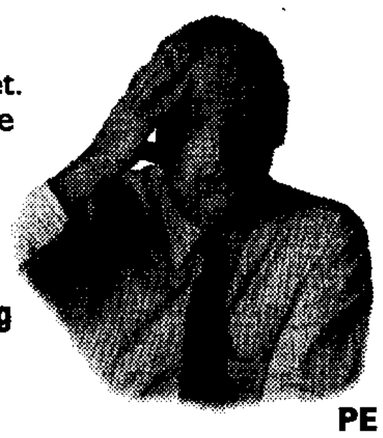

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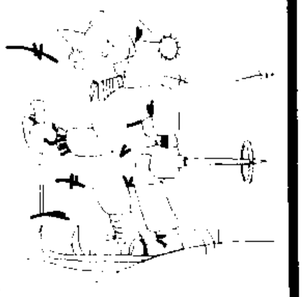

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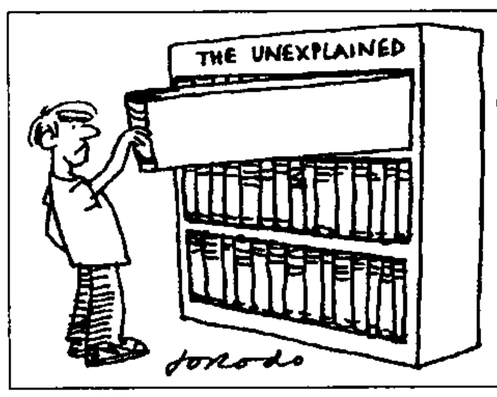

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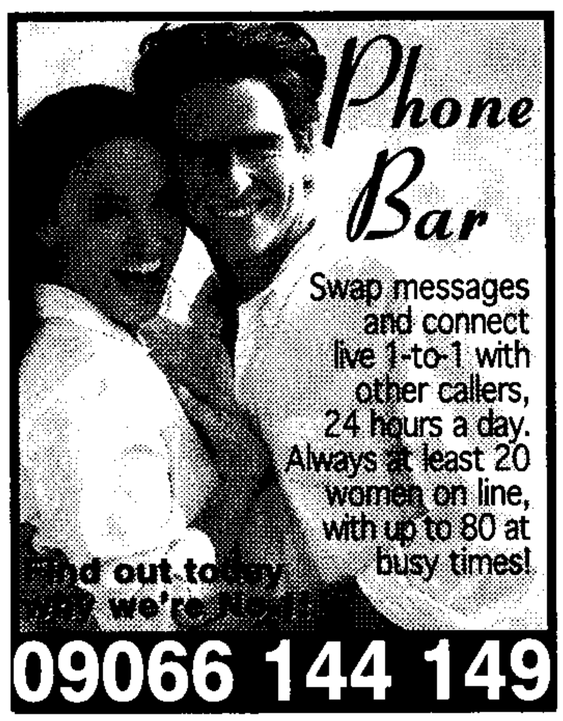
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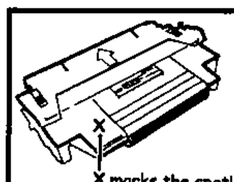

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SPEECHWRITING by Mitch Murray – see page 30...

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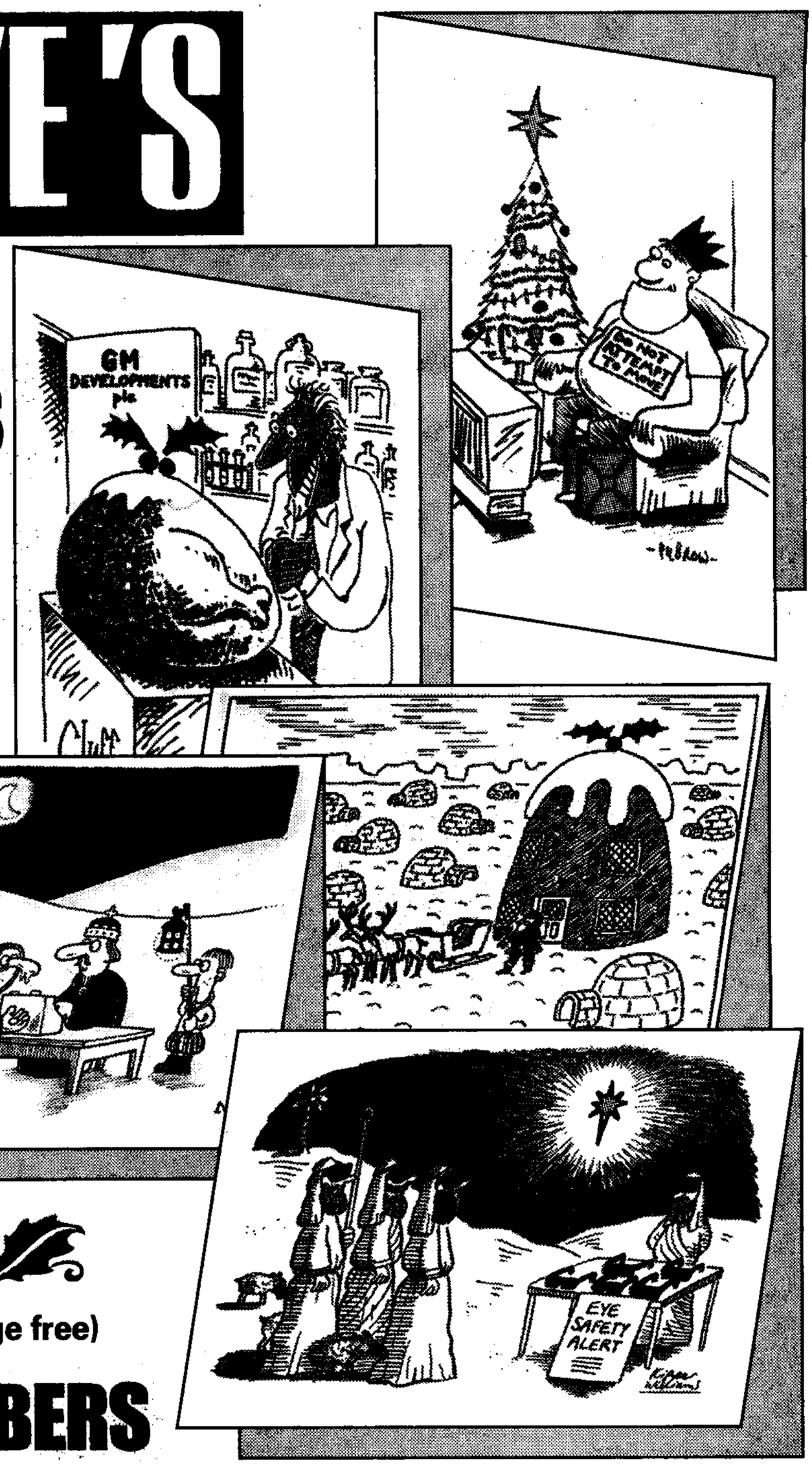
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